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The Christian Life, Part 3: Your Relationship with the World

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TEXT: John 15:18-16:4 (ESV)

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

Dear friends,

One day, Clarence Jordan, who is the author of the book *Cotton Patch Gospels*, which is a modern-day paraphrase of the New Testament, was getting a red carpet tour of another minister's church. With pride, the minister pointed to the rich imported pews and the beautiful decorations. As they stepped outside, darkness was falling and a spotlight shown on a huge cross on top of the church steeple. "That cross alone cost us \$10,000," the minister said with a smile. "You got cheated," said Jordan. "Times were when Christians could get them for free." Clarence Jordan's right, you know. I would also add: you still can, if you, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, remain faithful to Him in this world. That's what Jesus is telling us in today's passage.

As I said at the beginning of this little series on John 15, the Christian life is made up of three important relationships that Jesus is addressing here: our relationship with Jesus Christ, He says, "Abide in me." And also a relationship with one another as fellow believers: "Love one another as I've loved you," Jesus says. And finally, in this last section of the chapter, He describes the Christian's relationship with the world, and His words are rather ominous. He says, "If the world hates you, know it hated me first." Now, wouldn't that make the hair on the back of your neck stand up just a little bit, send a chill down your spine? I mean, this wasn't what the disciples were anticipating. I'm sure it's not what they signed up for. "You mean we're going to be hated? I don't like the sound of that one bit," they probably thought. Nobody likes being hated, do they? Like the little children's lament says, "Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, guess I'll go eat worms." Nobody likes being rejected and mistreated by others or marginalized. And yet that is exactly what Jesus is describing for those who faithfully follow Him in this world. He goes on to say, "Your relationship with the world is different now because you follow me. The world doesn't like that and they'll hate you for it because you belong to me." Jesus says it this way: "If you were of the world, they would love you as its own. But you are no longer of the world. You belong to me. I chose you out of this world. Therefore, the world hates you."

So who is this "world" He's talking about? Jesus is referring to unbelievers, the mass of humanity who are against Him; those who are under Satan's power and choose darkness over light. They hate Him. And so being "of the world" means you don't

follow Jesus and not being of the world means you believe and belong to Jesus and live life His way, following Him, walking in the light of His truth and grace. Therefore, the world hates the light that Jesus brings. Jesus talks about it in John 3. The world hates light. Those who live in darkness don't like the light. The light of God's truth and grace; evil and wrong do not like to be exposed to this light. And Jesus has said disciples of His reflect His light to the world, so they'll reject and hate you as my followers are shine for me. And Jesus says,

Just remember these words, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they'll persecute you. Also, remember, if they kept my word, they'll also keep yours. Sometimes people will hear the good news and come to faith in me as their savior, as you witness about me. But you're going to be persecuted. It's not going to be easy. Not everyone will like what you have to say about me, and they will make your life difficult on account of me.

And then Jesus explains,

And here's why they'll do that: because they do not know Him who sent me, (meaning God.) They think they understand God and His ways, but they do not have a clue. I've revealed everything they need to know and they're guilty of rejecting me, and now they have no excuse. And so whoever hates me is actually hating my Father, the one who sent me. And that's not good.

And there's another reason Jesus said, besides hating Jesus and hating God and the light of God, "another reason behind their hatred towards me," Jesus said, "is because this was all predicted in the Old Testament and it has to be fulfilled. God is fulfilling scripture." And then he quotes Psalm 69:4: "They hated me without a cause."

Can you imagine the horrified looks on the disciples' faces as they considered the future? Jesus must have seen those looks because He changes the tone of His message with some good words of encouragement then. He says, "But when the helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the spirit of truth, (meaning the Holy Spirit,) who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." Jesus is making a big promise here. He's saying "You will not be alone in all of this as you live for me, help is on the way. A helper's about to be sent to you and He will make me all the more real to the world. And He will empower your witness of me and He will be on your side. He'll have your back." And we know that Jesus kept that promise – at Pentecost. I'm reminded of Acts 5, after Pentecost, the apostles were doing marvelous miracles and they were arrested for causing a scene and brought before the religious authorities who

told them to shut up about Jesus and keep this to themselves. But Peter, on behalf of the group, said, "We have to obey God and not men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed, and He exalted Him at His right hand as savior to give repentance to Israel, forgiveness of sins." And he says, get this, he says, "We are witnesses to these things and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." Just as Jesus said, right?

This talk that Jesus is giving now winds up as he addresses why he is laying all of this heavy talk about hatred and rejection in their future. He says, "I've said these things to you to keep you from falling away. The time is coming when you will be thrown out of synagogues and killed by someone who thinks they're doing it for God." Of course, we know the apostle Paul is an example of this. He hated Christians and saw to the persecution of many Christians before he came to faith in Christ. And there were other religions that were going to make life all the more miserable, that saw persecuting Christians or even killing Christians is doing something good in the name of God: Roman paganism, Islam radicalism, even today. Jesus concludes His teaching with these words: "I said these things to you so that when their power comes, when the hour of persecution comes, you may remember what I've told you." A biblical commentator I was using for this passage wrote,

This passage is really one of the most helpful things Jesus could have told these men. Here's why: because Jesus knew what was coming for Himself, the cross, and He was fully prepared to endure it. It didn't take Him by surprise or deflect Him from His path of faithful, loving obedience to the father. So He knew his followers must likewise be prepared and not surprised by the persecution and rejection to come from an unbelieving world. You see, forewarned is "fore-armed."

And Jesus was right, that hour did come of persecution and it came just as He described. First of all, we see a preview of it just a few hours later after Jesus spoke these words in the upper room as he's arrested by the authorities and He's humiliated and He goes through suffering and even death on a cross. And on the third day, He rose again in victory over sin and death in the power of the devil. But the opposition remained.

And you read the Book of Acts and the New Testament letters and the Book of Revelation, and you find Christian persecution and martyrdom, just as Jesus said. And all but one of those disciples were martyred for Jesus, and the one who wasn't was

exiled. You look at history books, they described cruelties inflicted on those who follow Jesus without wavering, who would not walk away from faith in Christ. The Roman Empire did their best to wipe out the movement, but failed. Others have tried since and they have failed as well. And even now, *even now*, there are still extreme examples of anti-Christian hatred and persecution in parts of the world. According to the International Society for Human Rights, 80% of all acts of religious discrimination in the world today are directed at Christians. In Burma. The Chin and Karen Christians are routinely subjected to imprisonment, torture, forced labor, and murder. Persecution is increasing all the more in China. In North Korea, a quarter of the country's Christians live in forced labor camps. Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the Maldives all feature in the "10 worst places to be a Christian," because there is persecution in those places. This persecution also happens sometimes in more muted ways in the West, even in countries like the U.S., where we're protected by laws. You still might experience things like disapproval, ridicule, scorn, pressure to conform and be quiet, marginalizing... The exclusivity of Christ alone for salvation is challenged all the time in our society. And people who believe in Christ alone is the way the truth and life have been called intolerant and narrow minded and divisive troublemakers by some. And it's tempting – it's so tempting – to water the gospel down. And when you don't, you might take a hit.

So how are we, who belong to Jesus, to live in relationship to a world which is opposed to Him and those who follow Him? And Jesus has given us three ways to do that. First, He says, as we live with Him and for Him, we do so with our eyes wide open, remembering these words of His: "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you." You follow a lord who was crucified on a cross and said openly to those who would follow Him, "If any person would come after me, let him pick up his cross," not his Cadillac, his cross, "and follow me." So expect to take some hits for Him if you are going to be a faithful, obedient disciple who will not waver. Make up your mind now that you're going to follow Him no matter what. Forewarned is fore-armed.

Second thing: He tells us, we must always remember whose we are and what our purpose is. We're no longer of the world now. We belong to Jesus. And that relationship is forever. We've been purchased by His blood at the cross. And we live with this assurance: that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. We are Heaven-bound. No matter what the world may throw at us. We belong to Him forever.

We've been delivered from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the Kingdom of Jesus. And that makes us different from others. That makes us chosen out of the world, children of God, children of light, living for Jesus. So, be different. Act as a citizen of His kingdom and keep acting as a citizen, remembering that you are Christ's ambassador in this world, one through whom God makes His appeal to people who need Christ. You have a mission now: to bear witness for Jesus Christ, to stick up for Him. That's your purpose. You do that, first of all, by speaking up for Him, always being ready and willing to tell someone about Him, what He's done for you, what He's done for them when those opportunities arise, even if it might make you or others uncomfortable and awkward. You do that also by showing up: you stick up for Him by showing up for Him in obedience and service to the world, seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, right where He's placed you, ready to carry out His will of loving God and loving neighbor as self in the name of Jesus, being willing to love even difficult and hostile people.

I came across a story that's so inspired me about a church in Pakistan. In Pakistan, Christians comprise only 2.5% of the total population, and the rest is Islam. Reverend Munawar Rimalshah, in the northern city of Peshawar, reports on government-endorsed social and economic suffocation of the Christian community in Pakistan. Now, Pakistan's anti blasphemy laws pose a constant threat for Christians. In addition, the pastor says that in his province alone, local mobs have publicly urinated on Bibles and closed down four churches. However, despite this hatred towards Christians, he says he isn't bitter. Instead, he works for better relationship with his Muslim neighbors. He views the persecution as an opportunity to display Christ's love to others, even militant Muslims and al-Qaida members. He summarizes how his church responds to persecution. "We clean the wounds of those who hate us and those who would kill us." May God bless those efforts. It's an amazing story. We visited a church a while back and their mission statement said, "We're going to love you and there's nothing you can do about it." That's what Jesus is talking about. And as you can see, and maybe even experience, it's not always easy, is it? Sometimes you receive negative pushback and rejection, just as Jesus said you would.

So the last thing you do is go into this knowing that you can trust the Holy Spirit – help is here. In Christ, you have a helper who can and will do powerful things through you as you bear witness of Christ Jesus to those around you.

So there you have it, your relationship with the world. You go into it with eyes wide open, knowing whose you are, witnessing to those, trusting in the Holy Spirit to work. That's how we live. Now that I know this, what's my next step? What do I do from here? And the thing I've learned along the way is, first things first: pray, pray, pray... Commit yourself, first of all, in prayer to him who committed Himself to save you. Say "Yes, Lord, I'm ready to take a hit for you, to speak up, stick up, show up for you whenever. Wherever. Use me." And then begin to pray for those who, you know, don't believe in Christ, make a list of those people and ask the Holy Spirit to open their hearts and minds and give you the words they need to hear. He'll answer. And then get up and be a real disciple. Go make disciples and keep going, no matter what the rejection you might encounter, because Christ is counting on you in this world that needs Him.

Amen.