

When the world hates you...

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again, and thank you for the opportunity to preach the Word of God, to share the Word of God with you this morning. My kind of research interest as a Bible teacher is the John literature and John's Gospel particularly.

So it's a terrific coincidence, a divine coincidence that you're working through, John, and I get to open the Gospel with you.

John 15 is a wonderful chapter. Thank you. Is that better? John 15 is a wonderful chapter in the middle of John 13 to 17, the so-called farewell address of Jesus.

And it's a terrific passage that helps us to think about life in our world now. And I think John 15 overall is a little bit like a baseball diamond.

It helps me to think of the Christian life as a baseball diamond. We're standing on home base, and we're looking out to first base, second base, and third base. On first base is a relationship with Jesus.

[1 : 12] On second base is a relationship with one another. And on third base is a relationship with the world. And in this passage, Jesus takes us through those three bases.

He helps us to see that there's a feature or a key word for each of those relationships. For the relationship with Jesus, we are to remain in him and bear fruit.

For the relationship with one another, we are to love one another. And these are things that you've no doubt been thinking about over the last couple of weeks.

I like the baseball diamond illustration because in order to get to home when you're playing baseball, you have to go to first base and second base and third base. Some Christian people like to go to first base and stop there.

Christian life is all about a relationship with Jesus, and they become, it's kind of pietistic and focused, very spiritual. But they forget sometimes that there's a second base.

[2 : 15] Some Christian people like to run straight to second base, and they think that the Christian life is all about loving others, and it's not grounded in a relationship with Jesus. But we need to go to first base and to second base.

No one really wants to go to third base because that's the world, and that's not a great base to be. But Jesus is saying in order to get from home to home, we need to go through all three bases.

And so he teaches us about a relationship with him, a relationship with others, and this morning we're thinking about our relationship with the world around us.

So as we begin, let me again lead us in prayer and ask the Lord to speak to us. Now, Father, we thank you that you are not a shy God.

We thank you that you have spoken to us clearly in your Son and in the word that testifies to him.

We pray now that as we hear the words of Jesus, that you will help us to hear them as words for us and help us to take them to heart and to respond rightly.

[3 : 20] And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Verse 18 is where we begin. If the world hates you, Jesus says, keep in mind that it hated me first.

If here means since. Jesus is assuming that the world hates. He is not saying maybe, perhaps, if it so happens.

He's stating this as a fact that the world will oppose disciples. The world will have a negative attitude towards the disciples of Jesus.

In Jesus' words, the world will hate the disciples. It kind of begs the question of what does Jesus mean when he says the world? What world is he talking about?

The Bible uses the word world in three broad ways. The first way is the world in the sense of creation. God made the world and all that's in it.

[4 : 24] And that's not what Jesus is talking about here. It's just simply the creation that we live in. The second sense is the Bible will also use the word world just to talk about people generally.

So at one point in John's gospel, the Jewish leaders are worried that Jesus is becoming so popular, they say that the whole world is going after him.

And they just simply mean all the people. They don't mean that negatively. They don't mean that positively. They just mean that people, many, many people are going after him.

And so we will often talk about the world of people around us. It's a neutral term. The third sense is where the Bible uses it, and John uses it particularly, to talk about the world of humanity that is opposed to God.

Kind of picking up our catechism question earlier today. A world of people who are affected by sin, who have committed treason against their creator, and all the negative consequences that flow from that.

[5 : 36] A world of people in rebellion against God, and that creates kind of an environment or a system, a sociological system where God is opposed.

Where people together, either by design or accidentally, create a world where God is excluded or forgotten about or ignored as part of just the way things are.

Sometimes this happens quite violently, where people are very violently opposed to God and the Christian faith. Sometimes God is just simply squeezed out by so many other things that happen in the world around us.

The bottom line is, in the world around us, this kind of world that Jesus is talking about, it's very easy to live as if God doesn't exist for one reason or another.

And the Bible uses, talks about the world from two perspectives, two dangers to the Christian. One is familiar to us, where the world tries to squeeze us into its mould.

[6 : 48] We try to start to become like the world around us. And the people of Israel did this in the Old Testament. They took on the idols of the countries around them.

And there are warnings in the New Testament about not to love the world and the things of this world. One John talks about that. It's a world that makes unbelief easy because there are many things around.

But the other aspect is what Jesus is talking about in this passage, where the world actively opposes Christians and provides opposition. Israel lived in the midst of the nations and the nations were continually opposing Israel.

Christians now live in the midst of the world. And often we will find that there is antagonism, that there is hatred, that there is opposition from the world to believers precisely because they are disciples of Jesus.

And this is what Jesus says in verse 18. Since, or if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. We're not the first people to be hated for faith in God.

[7 : 59] Jesus was the first. That's what he's saying. Then he goes on. If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.

Jesus tells us, he tells the disciples and us, that they've been called out of the world. Once we were very at home in this world around us, but now Jesus has called us out to be with him.

And that places us into a new relationship with the environment around us, with the world from which we have been taken out. What Jesus seems to be suggesting, and what we know in our experience, is that it deeply irritates the world around us that the disciples' lives are not rooted in the world in which they live.

What happens is, as people become Christian people, as they're called out of the world, they start to see the world around them in different ways. They don't go along with it as well as they used to. They start to live in ways which are counter the world, which are counter the culture. They don't find their deepest joys. They don't seek after the things of this world.

[9 : 18] They don't find their interests in the world quite the way that they used to. And so disciples of Jesus start to find themselves out of step with the world.

They have a different value system. They worship God and not the things around them or the other gods that are around them. They have new convictions.

They start to maybe see things in the world as worthy of criticism, and saying that these are not the ways that God would have people live. And so little by little, and often very quickly, we start to see

the world around us in different terms, and we start to feel like we're very much out of step with our world, with its goals, with its passions, with its interests.

And so this can create tension, and Jesus calls this hatred, because we do not belong to the world anymore. This will be different in different cultures.

I'm not sure what you think about your world around you, but you live in a culture where there is a majority other religion, and I think you are more aware, perhaps, of a conflict or tension with that religion than I am in Australia, where there are many religions.

[10:35] Our problem in Australia is more that people just don't like Christian people. I'll talk a bit more about that in a moment, because they're annoying, but there is a much more kind of sharp religious dimension, I think, to your experience here.

Whatever. To be at home with Jesus is to be in tension with your world around you. That's what Jesus is saying. The statement that Jesus makes in verse 18, he picks up again in verse 20 and starts to expand it.

And he talks about how, as disciples of Jesus, we are identified with Jesus. People start to, if you claim the name of Jesus, then people will start to treat you and to think of you like they thought of Jesus.

There's an identity, an identification, which Jesus is very happy to make. He uses the image of a servant and a master. Jesus is the master, we are the servants, but the servants represent the master.

The master identifies with the servants, and to treat the servant is, in one sense, to treat the master as well. This is a kind of a very familiar image that Jesus uses on a number of occasions, and it gets played out in the lives of the disciples as they live in the world.

[11:56] The complete identification of Jesus with his followers is stressed in verse 20. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

Complete identity. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. So there's good and bad here, but we are completely identified, the disciples are identified with Jesus.

Some will be persecuted, others will keep the word. Either way, we are identified with Jesus.

Christ's followers will be hated by the world by their association with Jesus, by their identification with Jesus.

And as we stay in a relationship with Jesus, as we remain in his word, as he said back in the beginning of chapter 15, as we increase in love and obedience, in fruitfulness, as the Holy Spirit works within us to transform us, to make us more like the image of Jesus, we will increasingly have the same effect on our world as our master.

We will appear different. We will appear more like Christ in the middle of the world, not completely like Christ, of course. We have to wait for the second coming of the Lord Jesus for that to happen.

[13:20] But we will appear different. And if anything, our world doesn't like, it doesn't like people who are different. And yet this is what is happening to us.

It won't be all bad. As Jesus reminded us, some will keep the word, some will respond. But the accent on this passage is really about opposition.

Jesus is warning us about opposition. Why does the world hate? Why would Jesus say this? Why does the world hate?

Well, Jesus goes on to outline some various reasons. But at root, again, going back to our catechist question, is the fact is, the world does not know the one who sent Jesus.

The world does not know the one who sent me, he says in verse 21. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

[14:17] People show they don't know God by showing they don't know Jesus. And they show they don't know Jesus by not knowing God. The whole thing revolves around itself.

The disciples are hated on the account of the name of Jesus because the people who hate do not know God. Now, I'm not sure what it's like here in Sarawak, but in many places in Australia, this is almost literally true.

If you say the name Jesus, often you will get a very strong reaction just simply against that name. And people will call you a God-botherer or they will get upset, they will feel judged, there are all sorts of things.

It just seems to rob people up the wrong way just by simply saying, I follow Jesus. This is an interesting kind of phenomenon. But the name of Jesus implies a lack of recognition of the Father.

Secondly, Jesus says in verses 22, in verse 22, if I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin.

[15 : 29] And then in verse 24, he says, if I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen and yet they have hated both me and my Father.

When Jesus comes and comes to this world, he exposes the sin of the world. He comes as the righteous, the pure Son of God.

And in his words and his deeds, he shows that the world is out of step with God. And more than that, he proclaims that the world is under the judgment of God because it is out of step with God. Now, I'm not sure about you, but no one likes to be told they're wrong. No one likes to be told they're wrong. Jesus comes to this world and says, this world has got it wrong in a very fundamental way.

It says there is no God or it says there's another God. Whatever it says, it is wrong. And as a result of that, and again, going back to our catechist question, as a result of that rebellion against God, all sorts of things go wrong.

[16 : 45] It wrecks relationships. The world itself is in trouble. We know that very simply as soon as we turn on the news. There is something going wrong, but no one likes to be told there's something going wrong or shown.

When Jesus comes, he shows that something has gone badly wrong with the world that's there. And the, and so what, what Jesus does when he comes, he exposes the root of all the things that are going wrong as unbelief in him and his father.

And Jesus, by his coming, his words and his works show us that this is the case. And he says, I mean, I think he's exaggerating a little bit, but he says, if I had not come, then they would not have any sin.

And that, that's, we know that theologically, of course, that's not true that sin is a reality. But what he's saying is if I had, if I had not come, they would not have been as aware of sin perhaps as they are, that it's very clear as soon as we start talking about Jesus and who he is, his mission, his gospel, it's clear that there is something wrong, that there is a rejection, that there is rebellion, that there is guilt, that there is shame, all of these things.

And so the world hates Jesus because it exposes their sin. And it hates believers because of the identification with Jesus. People feel uneasy because we have a message that says you have gone wrong with God.

[18 : 15] You need, you're helpless. You need to get back with God in a way that you cannot do yourself. And this is a message that the world hates believers for. Finally, in verse 25, Jesus is saying all of this is somehow part of the father's plan.

He uses the words, this is to fulfill what is written in their law. And he's talking about the Jewish law. They hated me without reason. This looks like a quotation of a couple of passages in the Psalms. And what it's saying is that the Jews' own scriptures condemn their position. The Jewish people show what the world is like.

That ultimately their hatred is incomprehensible. It doesn't actually make sense. That there is a sense in which the hatred of the world makes no sense at all.

But it happens in fulfillment of scripture itself. I don't know about you, but sometimes I can be a little bit surprised by the opposition of the world around, particularly when evangelizing, because we call it good news.

[19 : 29] Yet why do people get upset and angry about good news? Why would they reject good news? But this is what happens. It doesn't make sense.

The gospel that we preach is a free gift of the best and the longest life possible. It's an offer of forgiveness for those who need it.

It sounds like good news, but it's rejected and it's hated. It actually doesn't make sense. I remember many years ago when I was working in a church, we used to do a lot of baptisms and we would, no, sorry, it was weddings.

It was a wedding interview. And I was a young couple, wanted to get married. And part of the preparation, they weren't believers, but part of the preparation was to talk them through the gospel background to the ceremony.

And I remember the young guy in front of me, he, I just explained all of that, how the gospel is a free gift and it's given to you.

[20 : 34] You need to accept it by faith. And he literally jumped out of his chair and said, this is amazing. This is the best thing I've ever heard in my entire life. Why aren't you telling everybody this?

And I thought, well, I kind of am. We are. You just can't hear it. And now you can. He was opposed to the gospel without reason. God opened his eyes and he saw it.

The world hates without reason. So Jesus teaches us about the hatred of the world, starts to explore the reasons for it. How are we to respond to this?

What should we do? And that's what he goes on to in the second part of the passage. In verse 26, he talks about the coming of the spirit.

Now, you've already looked at chapter 14. So you've started to think about the coming of the spirit. And there'll be a little bit more about that next week. The accent here is on the work of the spirit in testifying to Jesus.

[21 : 35] The spirit is going to come and he will help the disciples testify about Jesus. And Jesus says in verse 27 to the disciples he's talking to, you also must testify.

So the spirit will testify to Jesus. The disciples must testify to Jesus because they've been with Jesus from the beginning. So the response of Christian believers, the disciples originally and us by extension, is that we are to testify to a world that hates us.

That's the key word. If the key word for our relationship with Jesus is to abide in him, if the key word for our relationship with one another is to love one another, the key word for our relationship with the world is to testify.

And Jesus will go on to explain that. He wants us to witness. And the spirit will help us to do that in both word and deed.

This is the positive response that is accepted. Now, you know, you see how this might create a, what we would call a vicious circle. Through the power of the spirit, disciples will be enabled to bear testimony to Jesus, to his words and his works.

[22 : 54] In doing this, they're identified with his name and they will suffer persecution. This will provoke the antagonism of the world and their responses to bear further testimony.

So we go round and round that circle. We testify. There's a negative response. We testify and keep going around. And that's what Jesus wants us to do.

Why has he told us all of this? Verse 16, chapter 16, sorry, verse 1, really important verse. The greatest danger a disciple faces from the world is to fall away from the Christian faith.

The greatest danger is not persecution physically or socially or anything like that. The greatest danger, as Jesus goes on to say, is not even persecution which leads to death.

The greatest danger is giving up the Christian faith. Jesus has warned us, warned the disciples. He's warned us. All of us I have told you so you will not fall away.

[24 : 00] What's Jesus going, what's going to happen to the disciples? Verse 2, they will put you out of the synagogue. You'll be thrown out of your comfort zone.

You'll be excluded from the religion that you love. This is the original disciples. And then he goes on, in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think that they are offering a service to God.

Now, he's talking in a Jewish context here, and the persecution of believers was seen as a service to God because somehow they were opposing God's will.

This was part of the reason Jesus was crucified himself, because he was a blasphemer who claimed to be God and needed to be kind of judged and punished. People thought that they were doing a good thing in the sight of God when they crucified Jesus.

In fact, they had it completely wrong, of course. The time is coming for disciples when some will actually persecute them and kill them because they think they are serving God or their gods.

[25 : 05] The Roman emperor eventually, or the Roman empire, did this as well. They started to persecute Christians because of their beliefs, and they thought that their beliefs were destroying beliefs in the Roman gods.

They thought they were serving their gods by persecuting Christians. They thought they were serving their beliefs in the Roman gods.

Opposition challenges our sense of self-interest. No one wants to be hurt or humiliated or to suffer loss. All of these can make us think, is it really worth following the Christian faith?

And so Jesus is warning people. That's what he says right at the very end of our passage. I've told you this so that when the time comes, you will remember that I warned you about them.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed, as the expression goes. That we need to understand that this is teaching for the future. This is part of discipleship teaching to understand that when you become a follower of Jesus, you will face opposition of various kinds.

[26 : 40] And so there's no surprises when this comes. That's what Jesus is saying to the original disciples. And that's what we need to understand this morning. So that's Jesus' teaching.

How should we respond? What should we think? Let me make three comments. The first one is, understand that opposition from the world is part of the Christian experience.

It is part of the Christian experience. Sometimes when things don't quite turn out the way we expected, we can be a little bit disappointed. And this is often the experience of Christian people the first time they face opposition.

I thought it was going to be a little bit easier than this, they might say. We might feel a sense of disappointment, even disenchantment, because things aren't working out.

Isn't it true that when you become a Christian, your life just gets better and better and better? A kind of a version of what's sometimes called the prosperity gospel. Now, we might not fall for a thing like the prosperity gospel.

[27 : 46] But perhaps sometimes when opposition comes, we are more rocked than we should be when things don't go our way. I remember when I was evangelizing on a, we have a thing called a beach mission.

We go away for summer and we live in a caravan park and try and talk to the other campers about the Lord. And we got some fairly rude, harsh kind of words said about us.

And I realized at that time that I'd probably been bargaining with God a bit. That I was saying, if I obey you, everything's going to go good for me. And this shouldn't happen.

And it was a kind of a wake-up call. That I was maybe entitled to a trouble-free life because I'd been good enough to put my trust and faith in God and join his team, as I said earlier.

But it begs the question of what are we entitled to expect as children of the King? What are we entitled to? Well, there are plenty of entitlements.

[28 : 49] We have Jesus' abiding presence with us by the Spirit. We have the love of fellow believers. We know our prayers are heard and answered.

But along with those, Jesus promises trouble, hardship and persecution. There is a lot that is promised to believers.

We don't need to go looking for persecution. We don't need to go looking for trouble. It will find us. But we need to be obedient. Jesus warns us in advance that this will be the case.

There are no surprises if opposition comes. But if you're like me, you can easily forget about that and find yourself surprised. So we need to factor this teaching deep into our understanding of the Christian experience.

I notice you're doing a discipleship course. Is thinking about the world and its response and hardship part of that discipleship course? Sometimes we say to people, come to Jesus, your life will be fantastic.

[29 : 54] And then a little bit later on, we give them the fine print. Oh, we forgot to tell you that there's also going to be trouble and hardship along the way. We need to be clear about the whole Christian package.

That there is wonderful benefits. But there is also a cost to the following of the one who, of course, gave his life for us. We can also go a little bit deeper in this, though.

And these words also offer comfort to a persecuted church. If you are at the moment in a position where perhaps you are feeling the opposition, the tension with the world, even the hatred of the world a little bit more strongly than perhaps at other times, then take heart from what Jesus says about the servant-master relationship.

If the world hates you, Jesus says, remember it hated me, and it's part of that identification. There is a kind of a curious sense in which suffering by God's children, suffering at the hands of opposition, is seen not as a sign of God's absence, but as a sign of true discipleship.

In a curious way, it may well be an assurance to you that you are in the Christian faith, that this is what's happening. Paul makes a similar point in his letter to the Philippians.

[31 : 18] It is part of the plan for his son, for the followers of his son, for the kingdom of God. So if we understand what is going on, we can not only be forewarned, but perhaps there may even be encouragement in this as well as we understand it.

The second point is simply a challenge. Will you testify? Will you speak up out of love for Jesus?

Will you speak up out of love for Jesus?

Will you speak up out of love for Jesus?

Will you speak up out of love for the people around us? We need to speak. Now, I understand in every place it's not always easy, and the way that we speak and all those kind of things come into play.

But will we speak when we get the opportunity? Will we even try and create opportunities to speak? Now, God is amazing.

[33 : 10] He is amazing in his love for his people. He is amazing in his love for this world. I just noticed that evangelistic event on Easter.

That's my favorite verse in the Bible, or one of them, Romans 5, 8. God shows his love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

What amazing love that is. This is how God treats the world who rebels. He sends his son to die and then gives them a message and invites for eternal life. Our love for the world around us, the world that we are in tension with, ought to match God's love for the world and be expressed in pointing people to God's love in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we need to resist the temptation to be silent. We need to speak clearly, respectfully, boldly, patiently. Some have the gift for public speech.

Others have the gift for just the odd comment. There are lots of different ways that this can be done. We will have opportunity around us. We need to speak up. Maybe pick your moment, but let's not be silent.

[34 : 22] Finally, I want to pause to remember the experience of maybe the majority of Christians in the world today who live out their faith, conducted in an atmosphere of hostility and very active persecution.

Opposition is a reality in our world, but depending on where you are, for some, it can be mild embarrassment or social awkwardness.

In Australia, often because I'm an ordained minister, when you're at a dinner, people often say, you know, what do you do for a living? And I'll tell them I'm an ordained minister of the gospel or I work in a church or I preach the gospel to unbelievers.

And often what they'll do is they say, oh, excuse me, I've got to go to the toilet. And then they don't come back. You know, that's a little humiliating, a little embarrassing, barely opposition, but it's happened a number of times there.

There are many people in the world for whom that opposition is so much more intense, so much more intense. I was looking at a website this morning, the Open Doors Watch List of the 50 most difficult countries in which to be a Christian.

[35 : 36] At the very top, North Korea, Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea, Syria, Nigeria, Pakistan, Libya, Iran.

I think Malaysia comes in at number 39 on that list. Interesting. There are many difficult places to be a Christian person because of active persecution.

I heard a talk from a guy who ministers to people in Syria. Apparently, the life expectancy for a person who converts from being a Muslim to being a Christian in Syria is around six to eight weeks. Just because of persecution that goes on. Now, he might have been exaggerating for effect, but it's not easy. We do well to remember brothers and sisters suffering for their faith in our country and around the globe.

And remember that there are many people suffering with and for the Lord Jesus in their circumstances. And pray for them and ourselves that they will not fall away.

[36 : 43] They will not be surprised. And that if possible, they will find a way to testify. If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

We need to keep before ourselves the basics of a theological understanding of opposition and persecution. It's because of our allegiance for Jesus. It will come.

It will be part and parcel of our life in this world. But we are to be confident in the sovereignty of God in the midst of this. That this is part, somehow, of God's plan.

We need to take heed of that proper response. And find out in our own way, in our own place, how we might testify to support one another.

And our brothers and sisters around the world who are persecuted and pray in opposition of all stripes. It's interesting when you're running around those bases.

[37 : 44] Third base is so close to home. It's not the right place to stumble. You want to keep running through third base and get back to home. Because home's great.

Home base is great. We started home because of the grace of God. We're heading home because of the grace of God. And as we do, we have these relationships. We stick with Jesus. We love one another.

But today, we remind ourselves that we testify to a world that is in opposition to us and to our Lord and our Master. Let's pray for his help.

Father, we thank you for Jesus and his teaching. We thank you that he teaches us about so many things. Primarily, of course, your great love for us in the sending and sacrifice of the Son.

But he also helps us to see the realities of our situation. Father, some of us here will be feeling the tension of this passage more than others. But we know that all of us in some way are going to feel out of step with this world.

[38 : 49] That we will know the hatred of this world in one way or another. And Father, we pray that you will help us to not be surprised by that, to heed Jesus' warning, to understand that this is part of our discipleship.

And we pray that you will help us to find ways where we can to testify to your love. To help us to love this world that hates us, as you love this world that rejected you and your Son.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.