

See the Son. Believe for Life.

United with Christ, Hated by the World – John 15:18-16:4

Christians have always tried to understand the relationship we have with the world around us. The Bible speaks about two separate kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. In Ephesians 2:1-2 we read about the kingdom of this world, into which we were all born. The difficulty is that these two kingdoms do not have clear physical borders. We aren't talking about the United States and Canada here. In many ways these kingdoms overlap, and the reality is that as Christians we live our lives in both simultaneously.

Perhaps no one understood this better than Augustine, who lived in the Roman Empire in the late 4th and early 5th century. He was educated as a Roman and saw the value of much of what he learned, but when he came to Christ, He also began to see the contradictions in the Roman worldview and way of life. So, he wrote a massive work called *The City of God* in which he describes the differences in these two kingdoms. In the first part of the book, he critiques the Roman culture of his time and points out the inconsistencies and absurdities in it. Then, in the second part he carefully walks the reader through the biblical story, which is the unfolding of God's kingdom, culminating, through Christ, in the eternal state.

This morning, if you are a follower of Christ, you are living in two kingdoms at the same time and you must begin to understand how they relate to each other in order to live faithfully. I'm not promising that our passage this morning will solve all your struggles with what faithfulness in the world looks like for a 21st century Christian in America, but it will clarify some truths about the world around us and what Christ expects of us. So, in John 15:18-16:4 we are going to see **3 Certainties about Our Ongoing Relationship with the World.**

1. The Reality – Union with Christ Guarantees the World's Hatred (15:18-20)

The goal of Christ's words to His disciples in chapters 13-15 so far has been to prepare them for His departure. He's promised them the Holy Spirit as another helper. He's taught them to sacrificially love one another, and He's told them to abide in Him as the branch abides in the vine in order to bear fruit. Now in 15:18 he rather dramatically turns His attention to their relationship with the world around them. Look at verse 18.

All the benefits that Christ promises in these chapters comes to the disciples because of their union with Christ and now he tells them that hatred will come their way because of their union with him. Jesus says “if” here, but he is saying this as something that is to be expected. By the time the Gospel of John was written and was in the hands of readers around the Roman Empire, Christians were marginalized and suffering the loss of property and reputation for their faith.

Now, to really grasp what Jesus is saying here we need to talk about his use of the word “world”. The Apostle John uses this word in his writings to refer to the temporal system of unredeemed humanity in rebellion against God. It’s what happens when you get a bunch of people living sinful and self-centered lives and they work together to express their self-centeredness. They create systems and ways of life that express their sinful desires. And it’s important to remember that the real issue in the world is a matter of the heart. It’s about desires. The world is driven by loves and affections.

Listen to 1 John 2:15-16. The desires of the flesh are the wants and values of unredeemed and fallen human life. The desires of the eyes are desires motivated by the temporal things that one sees. It’s all about the visible and temporal as opposed to the invisible and eternal. The pride of life is about boasting in material possessions that sustain physical life here and now. You put these three together and you get a sinful focus on temporal life to the exclusion of God and eternity. Look at 1 John 2:17.

Followers of Christ have a different set of desires and values, and this puts us out of step with the system around us. Look at verse 19. To be “of” the world is to be driven by the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life. It’s to live with the same values and loves as the unredeemed. It’s to love the system that promotes a way of life according to these values. But Christians, even though we were born into this way of life, have been rescued out of it by God’s sovereign grace. Look at the end of verse 19.

But let me make it clear here that Jesus did not choose us out of the world in order to tuck us away like a rare fragile vase that must be preserved. To be chosen out of the world means that we now have new life and a new master and are no longer driven by the same desires as the world. It does not mean that we

are to be out of contact with those in the world. John 17:15. This is a problem of perspective for many Christians. If we can just isolate ourselves and keep away from unbelievers, we can sort of hold on to the end. That's not what Jesus is calling His disciples to. Instead, he sends them out into a hostile world and prepares them for what they will face. He doesn't give them rations and send them into the fox hole to try and survive. He equips them with love and light and sends them into the darkness knowing they will be despised because Christ was despised. Look at verse 20.

In John 13:16 Jesus spoke these words to his disciples when he washed their feet. They should imitate his way of life and here he uses this principle to prepare them for the hatred of the world. With the departure of Jesus, his disciples now become the focal point of persecution and the ongoing proclamation of salvation, which is what the end of verse 20 means. They pronounce the good news and those who hear either persecute them or respond with belief and faith.

So, we know we will be looked down on by the world because of our connection to Christ, but can we get more specific?

2. The Reason – Christ's Word's and Work's Bring Condemnation to the World (15:21-25)

Look at verse 21. The world hates the followers of Christ when they live and act in line with the character and name of Jesus.

The last line of verse 21 will be repeated throughout this section and it's the ultimate reason that the world hates Jesus and His followers. They do not know God, even those who claim to but still persecute His followers ultimately do not know God.

But Jesus gets even more specific as to why the world has despised him. 2 major reasons. Look first at verses 22-23. Of course, Jesus doesn't mean that unbelievers would be free from sin if he hadn't come. What he does mean is that his words are light that pierces into the darkness and show just how sinful the hearts of those in the world really are. Now they have received the light and have rejected it and so they have no excuse for their sin. They have been made aware of it and chosen to continue in it. John 7:7.

Their hatred of the Father and Son is not just because of His words. Look at verse 24. The first twelve chapters of John's Gospel presented a series of signs meant to confirm that Jesus has been sent from God. Listen to John 5:36 and John 10:25. But again, despite the clear revelation of who Christ is, the world has chosen to respond in hatred. This makes sense though. If you are sinning and guilty of sin and someone exposes your sin, there are two options for your response. You can deny that it's sin and get mad at the one exposing it or, you can accept that it's sin and turn from it in repentance.

Clearly, when Jesus came into the scene, many people respond with frustration and rejection and that continues to happen as His followers proclaim His name. But none of this was unexpected by God. Look at verse 25. You can see the word "must" there in verse 25. The hatred of the world fulfills Scripture. How so? This quote is taken from Psalm 69, which John has already quoted in John 2 as a messianic Psalm. But it's not just a prediction of something that would happen to Messiah. Psalm 69 is a Psalm by David and about his experience of being hated without a reason. Jesus identifies Himself here as the greater David with typology. The life of Jesus repeats the same pattern of experience that David went through but it escalates in significance.

David suffered without cause and prayed for deliverance and salvation from God. Jesus suffered without cause and **brought** deliverance and salvation from God to His people. Jesus comes into the world knowing full well that He will be hated to the point of death. Yet rather than running from the persecution and suffering, he leans into it for the sake of saving those who will believe in Him and this fulfills Scripture.

I'd also like to make a small application point here. Notice that Jesus suffered hatred without cause. He spoke God's words and did His works and was hated for it. He came to bring love, grace, and salvation and was hated for it. Let's be careful to be hated for the right reasons. There's an argument I hear a lot now that the stakes are so high and the culture is so deeply troubled that we have to do whatever it takes to win, even if that means being immoral or hated filled ourselves. That's simply worldly thinking. Listen to how Peter hits this head on. 1 Peter 2:20-23 and 1 Peter 3:13-17. It is possible to speak the truth in grace and

love without being immoral and a jerk. How can we do this? through Christ's help as we bear witness.

3. The Reassurance – Christ Provides Help Through the Spirit (15:26-16:4)

Look at verses 26-27. Of course, Jesus promised the Spirit to them with details in chapter 14. But He explains a little bit more about the Spirit's identity here. Notice the language the Spirit will be sent by Jesus from the Father and will proceed from the Father. Christ's "sentness" from the Father has indicated throughout the Gospel of John that He is one with the Father. Now we have Jesus saying that He and the Father will send the Spirit to the disciples. What does this tell us? That God will be with us through the Spirit. The Spirit will testify to Christ in us and equip and enable us to testify about Christ to the world around us. Keep in mind that this is a hostile world. Once again, Jesus is not preparing us to isolate ourselves into our little group. He's preparing us to be sent out as witnesses. Witnesses to what? Christ.

But this will get hard at times. Look at 16:1-3. The worst thing that can happen to you is not suffering for your faith. It's rejecting Christ because of the suffering and proving that you were never really a believer in the first place. Jesus even says that many of those who cause the persecution will do it out of religious motivations. They will think they are serving God but ultimately, according to verse 3, they don't really know God.

Jesus is telling His disciples this to prepare them. Verse 4. Many of you will know the name John Piper and some of you I'm sure have benefited from his writing and speaking over the years. He was asked recently this question: "How can American pastors begin to prepare the churches for persecution?" I'd like to read you some of his answer.

My answer would be, you should have started a long time ago—like, from your very first sermon when you came to your church. You must teach your people that they are not first Americans but Christians. Christians are aliens and exiles on planet earth. This world does not owe Christians anything. And Christians should expect to suffer.

We should preach these truths even when things are going as well as they can possibly go, because hostility against Christianity is built into the nature of the

fallen world. In a sense, I am a little uncomfortable with painting the present moment as extraordinary and terrible, so that it becomes the reason Christians need to be ready to suffer. From the get-go and for fifty years, I want pastors to help Christians see that life is hard and that they are going to suffer. Jesus said, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Jn. 15:20b). This is plain biblical teaching. Therefore, suffering by persecution is not peculiar to America. All over the world over, Christians are suffering persecution.

In preaching and pastoring, I want to prepare martyrs. I want my people to go to the hardest places in the world. So, my answer to how you preach, considering current persecution and pressure, is that you preach the sovereignty of God and that suffering is to be expected. This is the opposite of prosperity theology. The problem with prosperity theology is that it lacks a doctrine of suffering. Pastors, you want to build the capacity to suffer into your people. That suffering may be a child born without the ability to speak, or it may be persecution. No one knows in what ways Christians will suffer in their lifetimes.

I think constantly narrating how bad things are can have an effect of making people angry and sowing seeds of bitterness. The last thing we want is for people to walk out of church on Sunday, seething in anger at their culture; that's the dominant emotion they have.

I want them thrilled with the sovereignty of God.

Thrilled that they're saved.

Thrilled that they have meaning in life rooted in the gospel.

Thrilled that no matter what happens in this world, they're going to be able to walk in the truth and joy.

And I think this is exactly the perspective Jesus is building into His disciples and us here in our passage this morning. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions

11/27/22

- How would you describe your current understanding of the relationship between Christians and the culture? What different approaches to this relationship have you heard about or experienced in the past?
- What sort of persecution did Christians face in the 1st century?
- How would you define the world? How does John define the world according to 1 John 2:15-17? What are some possible dangers of wrongly defining “the world” and “worldliness”?
- In what ways does the world express itself as a system?
- What does it look like to be “of the world” (v. 19)?
- In verse 19 Jesus says that He chose His disciples out of the world. Does this mean that Christians are to seek to minimize contact with the world? Why or why not?
- What does Jesus mean at the end of verse 20 when he says “If they kept my word, they will also keep yours”?
- What are the two major reasons that the world hates Christ in verses 22-24?

- What OT passage does Jesus quote from in verse 25 and how is his life a fulfillment of this passage?
- In what ways is Jesus similar to David's experience in this Psalm and in what ways is He different?
- What can we learn from the fact that Jesus was hated without a cause? How does this help us to form our posture toward the unbelieving culture around us?
- What are some ways that we can prepare ourselves for suffering?