

John 15:18-16:4

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Date: 02 June 2024

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[0 : 00] Please turn back in your Bibles to John chapter 15 and pick things up at verse 18. While you're turning there, can I just say that John D. Rhodes won't be preaching this evening.

He got his dates mixed up and so he phoned me and let me know the good news. So when you next see him, do remind him that you felt very let down by that.

John D is an old friend of mine, don't worry. So John 15, let's pray before we dive in. Our Father and our God, we ask that you would speak in these moments and that we would listen and that we would hear the voice of the living God and so be changed.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Whether you're preparing to go to war or you are getting set up for a sports challenge of some kind or even a political debate, knowing your opposition is a significant part of the battle.

It might be your commanding officer giving instructions about the tactics that the enemy employ. It might be the coaches giving the team talk to say, this is how they attack in this part of the field and we need to set up like this.

[1 : 18] And it may be Rishi Sunak's advisors telling him what to expect across the chamber in PMQs. Probably won't be another Rishi Sunak at PMQs, but there we are.

In each case, they are being given a brief on the opposition so that they can be as well prepared as possible. Know your enemy and know how they attack.

Having explained to the disciples what their relationship should be to him, they should abide in him, they should remain in him, by keeping his commandments in order to be fruitful.

Jesus now turns to prepare his disciples for what lies ahead. Having explained to him how they are to relate to him, he now turns to explain how they are to relate to the world around them.

And as they think about the world around them, they need to know what it's going to be like. As Jesus departs to return to the Father, he explains what they need to expect.

[2 : 22] They should expect opposition. Opposition from the world around them. Indeed, verse 19, have a look. Verse 19, it is very stark. Jesus says, they'll be hated. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but because you're not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

He doesn't mess around. And can I say this morning, if you are coming to Christ, if you are weighing up what that decision, putting your faith in Christ, will mean for you, this is what to expect. The world around you will hate you. Jesus doesn't want there to be any surprises, any unmet expectations, any, wait, hang on a minute, no one told me this was coming.

Such the disciples then just decide to give up. He tells us that in 16, verse 1. Do you see, I've said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. I'm telling you what it's going to be like, so you're as well prepared as possible, so that you don't give up when the temperature rises.

If you're expecting sunshine and all you get is rain, you might think that you've got something wrong. There's a defect in you in some way. Or you might think that you've been misled in some way, and Jesus wants to prevent this from happening.

[3 : 40] I don't know if you've ever been knocked out, if you've ever been knocked unconscious, maybe in sport or something like that. They might have given you smelling salts to clear your head. This little thing that they waft under your nose, it's incredibly pungent, and it clears your head.

Well, after all the talk that we've had last week about abiding in the Father's love, verse 19 is a bit like smelling salts. It's pungent, and we want to recoil. But Jesus isn't like the shonky timeshare salesman showing the fake photos of the development that doesn't exist in order that you'll sign up and pay the money.

He isn't trying to sugarcoat things to get you in and will deal with the problems down the line. He's very clear right up front. Here it all is, the world, the realm of those outside Christ's kingdom, those who are enemies of God, they will hate you, he says.

And this morning, Jesus unpacks the nature of this hatred. But I want us to see He also provides significant encouragement as well. We've got two points this morning. The first is the world's hatred, and the second is God's help.

The world's hatred and God's help. So let's start with the world's hatred. And Jesus doesn't just tell the disciples that they're going to be hated. He explains why it is the case, and He sets it in context. [4 : 59] And so there are three things that I want us to note here. First thing is, the world's hatred, first thing, it's really hatred of God. That's what Jesus says.

On the one hand, any hatred the disciples will experience has already been experienced by Jesus. Verse 18, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. And of course, they've seen up close how Jesus was rejected by the scribes and the Pharisees, and throughout His ministry, the opposition He faced.

But of course, within 24 hours of this conversation, they will witness the hatred of the world towards Jesus in the most stark way possible. He will be mocked and beaten and nailed to a Roman cross and executed at the hands of this corrupt regime.

The world hated Jesus more than anyone has ever been hated. But Jesus makes it clear that their hatred runs deeper than that.

Look down at verse 23. He says, 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.

[6 : 08] But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. Jesus has told us just a few, well, a few verses earlier.

It would have been a few minutes earlier in the context of the conversation. Chapter 14, verses 10 and 11. His words are the Father's words. His works are the Father's works.

Because He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him. When the world rejects Jesus, they are rejecting the Father who indwells Jesus and who sent Jesus.

Of course, we could also say, if we look ahead, when the Spirit whom Jesus promised to send after His departure, down verse 26, when He comes, we read on in the early chapters of the book of Acts, that alongside the blessing and the growth of the church, we see people lying to the Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira, Acts chapter 5. And persecution following all these Spirit-filled people. The world's hatred of the church is simply an expression of its hatred of God.

[7 : 12] Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And because Christ has chosen His church out of the world, because He has taken us out of this realm, the world reacts.

Now, just as Jesus makes clear the hatred He faces is fulfilling Scripture, verse 25. You see that? But the word that was written in their law must be fulfilled. They hated me without a cause.

It's clear that He's in total control of everything that's going on. He's fulfilling Old Testament Scripture as He goes. Just as that's the case, so everything that He tells the disciples came to pass in the early church.

Jesus' followers were persecuted and martyred for their faith. Almost all of the men at this table would die for following Christ. So, because the church has been named for God in baptism, because we are united to Christ as His bride, because we are then, verse 19, not of the world, but we belong to the kingdom of God, the world hates us.

So, when you're opposed for your faith, don't be surprised. And in a sense, don't take it personally. The world only hates you because it hates God.

[8 : 31] The second aspect of the hatred I want to highlight is this. It distorts reality. The world's hatred distorts reality. Look at 16, verse 2. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he's offering service to God.

Now, the opposition that these disciples faced came from a religious establishment that believed that they were the true people of God. They were convinced that their hatred of this sect, this group that became known as Christians because they followed this one who said of himself that he was the Christ.

They were convinced that their hatred of this sect was actually a godly thing, that they would kill the disciples thinking that God was pleased with them. Their world was upside down.

They had completely distorted what it meant to serve God and what constituted good and what constituted evil. Now, the context is different, but there's a similar distortion in the opposition that we face today in that the hatred that is directed towards us is presented in virtuous terms.

We saw this with the late great atheist Christopher Hitchens, whose opposition was largely based on moral grounds. He was assuming the moral high ground in his opposition of Christianity.

[9 : 47] He described it as, quote, a wicked cult. For that reason, he said that Christianity should be extinguished. Now, a world without God isn't by necessity a world without moral absolutes.

So, why he can call it wicked, I don't know. It's inconsistent, but he did. He deemed the faith to be wicked, a moral term. And today it's the case that almost all of the most vitriolic opposition that Christians face is presented in moral terms.

Red-faced shouting, block capitals online, it is evil to raise your children as Christians. It is wrong to prevent women from aborting their baby.

It is right and merciful to allow someone to end their own life. It is discrimination to prevent two people who love each other from being married. Now, the world may not believe in the God of the Bible, but they seek to take the moral high ground in their hatred of the church.

This distorts reality. It's God's world. God made it the way he made it, and he ordered it the way he ordered it, and the right way up is to follow his way.

[11 : 00] But when right is seen as wrong, and wrong as right, when up is portrayed as down, and down up, don't be surprised when you see it. Christians often get wound up about the way the world operates.

When Christians are misrepresented or their arguments are dismissed without any meaningful engagement, but we shouldn't be surprised. The enemy doesn't fight fair. And this always involves some kind of distortion of reality.

You are wrong. When you say you are wrong about somebody who is following the order of the world the way that it was made, they've distorted reality. Firstly, it's really a hatred of God.

Secondly, it distorts reality. Third aspect of the world's hatred that Jesus highlights is that it is a mark of genuineness. Fifteen, verse twenty.

It's a mark of genuineness. Remember the word that I said to you. A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they'll also persecute you. If they kept my word, the sentence is, if they obeyed my word, they will also obey yours.

[12 : 09] Now, this will be the pattern of the disciples' mission. Persecution and obedience going hand in hand. But because no servant is greater than his master, it follows that those who suffer for the sake of the gospel, and that's opposed to suffering for being a fool in some way or other, that is possible.

It is possible to be a Christian and to be suffering, but not to be suffering for the gospel. It's just because we're being silly in some way. But it's the case that if we suffer for the sake of the gospel, we are following in Christ's footsteps.

We are walking the same path that our master walked, and therefore, we're showing ourselves to be the real deal. Jesus is clear, verse 19, that no one hates people who do the same things they do. No one hates people whose lifestyle choices are the same as theirs. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. Of course they would. Lives that look like the world don't invite criticism.

Because, of course, there's nothing about your life that makes them feel uncomfortable in any way. If we're all in this together, well then, there's an implicit endorsement of my lifestyle choices. But if you've chosen a different course, that means you don't approve of my course.

[13 : 29] Well, how dare you? When your life displays the fruit of the different decisions that you have taken because you follow the Lord Jesus, that Christ-likeness provokes people.

You might have experienced this. It happens in the strangest ways. It can happen in the strangest ways. I remember a long time ago, not long after I came to faith, being out with a friend of mine who had brought a couple of friends along that I didn't know so well.

We'd been there for about an hour, and the chat was all fairly superficial, and I got up and went to the toilet. And when I came back, the other two friends of my friend had left, and I said, oh, where have they gone?

And he said, they left because they were fed up with you banging on about your Christian faith. I hadn't mentioned my Christian faith once. I wasn't being especially virtuous at all, but I was just

different.

And this is how it sometimes goes. You wonder why this person or these people are aloof or distant or even a bit rude, even though you've been very nice to them.

[14 : 40] Why do these people seem to not like you despite the fact that you're a stand-up person in terms of the way that you treat them? It's because you're not of the world. You're following the same path as the Lord Jesus.

And their rejection of you, and it can be a very polite rejection, but that rejection is a mark of genuine discipleship. Now, the hatred won't be nice.

Jesus is telling us here about something that isn't nice. It's not easy, and it can be very painful, but there's a sense in which you should take encouragement from it.

When the world hates you, it hates you because you're following the example of the one they hated first, your master, the Lord Jesus. When you experience that hatred, there's a sense in which it shows that your faith is alive and that God is at work in you.

When hatred comes our way, we often think, oh, poor me. That's the instinct, isn't it? Self-pity. We think, oh, it's so terrible the way these people treat me. And it might be terrible, but the fact of the matter is we shouldn't be surprised.

[15 : 52] And the fact that it's going on shows that we're following in the footsteps of our master. Well, in preparing his disciples, Jesus promises them that the world will hate them. He gives them the smelling salts that cause them to think, goodness.

But he also promises them something else in the midst of this opposition, and that's our second point. It's God's help. God's help. The presence of hatred is a strange encouragement because it's a mark of genuineness.

Jesus offers three further encouragements as they look ahead. the disciples will know, first of all, the Father's care. Chapter 15, verse 21, But all these things they will do to you on account of my name because they do not know him who sent me.

By implication, Jesus is drawing a contrast here to remind the disciples that their opponents don't know the Father, but that they do. Again, in 16, verse 3, have a look, And they will do these things because they have not known the Father nor me.

However painful the hatred gets, the disciples should know that they belong under the tender care of their Heavenly Father.

[17 : 08] Elsewhere, Luke chapter 12, Jesus, you remember, talks about how the sparrow that sells for next to nothing in the market is not forgotten by God and how much more valuable to Him are His loved ones.

No opposition can take you from the fatherly care of your Heavenly Father. No hatred can accomplish anything outside of His ordaining.

You are secure in the Father's care. Where I grew up, there were lots of children around the same age who played together in our road and there was one boy in particular who I didn't like and he didn't like me and he was an amazing footballer and I was so jealous and typically couldn't get anywhere close to him when we were playing football so I'd like hack him and be nasty and that kind of thing so I didn't like him because he was better than me, he didn't like me because I was nasty.

That's the back story just so you're clear. There was one occasion we had many fights over the years but there was one occasion we had a scrap and he ran home because he was soft and I... Where are you now, John? Yeah, anyway. He ran home. I chased him up to the point where he ran into his driveway and his urgent running all of a sudden turned into a bit of a slow swagger.

[18 : 45] Because his dad was in the porch all of a sudden cool as you like of course he was he knew that he was now safe under his father's care. He knew that his father could see and his father would make sure he was okay.

And that's the way it is for the Christian believer in the context of the world's hatred. They can chase us they can knock us around but our father in heaven sees and he cares and he protects us.

And even when that protection doesn't always keep us from pain it will only be pain that he allows. And he will ultimately turn any harm that they do around for our good and we will be vindicated in the end.

Your opponents do not have a heavenly father but you do. And you're safe under his fatherly care. Then the second expression of God's help is the promise of the Spirit.

Verse 26. Here we have the Spirit's help. The world will hate you. Verse 26. 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.

[20 : 05] Jesus will help the disciples but not at arm's length but by sending the Helper the Holy Spirit from the Father who will himself bear witness about Christ and strengthen the disciples to do the same.

Now the way the language works here in this verse is important and if we understand it properly the encouragement that these verses provide is deep as deep can be. So the sending of the Spirit you see it lies in the future.

Jesus says he will send him. And this happened in history at the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was given to the disciples. And as they bore witness to Christ in the preaching of the Gospel the Spirit opened the eyes of 3,000 people.

The church was born. The missionary endeavor across the world began. And people were one to Christ. But notice also that Jesus says the Spirit proceeds from the Father.

He proceeds from the Father in the present. That is happening in the present. This is referring to the eternal and ongoing procession of the Spirit from the Father. What Jesus is doing here is amazing.

[21 : 12] He is taking us behind the curtain as it were to glimpse the mystery of God the Holy Trinity. and telling these disciples that through the Lord Jesus they have been brought to know the Father in whom the Son dwells and the Father and the Son, remember, and from whom the Spirit eternally proceeds.

That's the care that they've been brought into. The doctrine of the Trinity is seen by some as a sort of speculative doctrine. It's not very practical. It's only for the theologians.

We want something more relevant, we're told. But that simply cannot be the case when we read these verses, can it? The Lord Jesus clearly believes that in order to prepare these disciples for their darkest hour, the world is going to hate you.

What do you need to know? They need to grasp the fundamental reality of who God is. When the Helper who was with Jesus in the beginning, who eternally proceeds from the Father, when He comes, He will resource the disciples with the power of heaven, and He will anchor them to God the Holy Trinity.

No enemy force is better resourced than the church. Before the God of all eternity, every, every enemy fades away.

[22 : 34] This is encouraging for us as we face the hostility of the world. We have the same divine helper, the indwelling Spirit at work in us, and He enables us to go on bearing witness to the Lord Jesus in our lives.

Wherever you are, wherever the Lord has placed you in your day to day, you have all of the power of the indwelling Spirit at work in you to enable you to bear witness to Christ, to be faithful to Christ where you are.

Of course, it's also worth saying that we are the beneficiaries of the fulfillment of this promise in the life of these men. the promise to these men. They were emboldened by these words that Jesus spoke, and the early church testifies to their witness in the world as the gospel is preached to all nations, and the church begins to grow.

And, in addition to that, this group were also enabled by the Spirit to provide the church in every age through their witness to Christ in the writing of the New Testament. We have a New Testament because the helper came and helped this group bear witness.

In the New Testament, we have the joint witness of these apostles and the Holy Spirit. And because they were both with Christ from the beginning, verse 27, the beginning of His earthly ministry in the case of the apostles, and the beginning of His life in the case of the Holy Spirit, we can trust their words.

[23 : 56] The Father's care, the Spirit's help, and then finally, more briefly, we're also helped by Christ's message. The message that He's given us here, 16, verse 4, have a look, but I have said these things to you that when there are comes, you may remember that I told them to you.

The very fact of this instruction from Jesus is help in itself because it means that we aren't surprised by anything that lies ahead. I said this at the start, when we know what's coming, we can prepare.

When we know the way the enemy operates, we can set ourselves up in order to give us the best possible chance. I don't know what form the hatred will take. I don't know exactly where the opposition will come from, but it will come, and I'm expecting it.

forewarned is forearmed. When the storms gather, when relationships break down, when hostility from the HR department and work gets kind of steamed up, you get cancelled, whether young people being bullied in school because you're a Christian, or there's division in the church, or whatever the opposition might look like.

when this happens, we're not surprised. We're not thinking that something has gone wrong. We're not thinking necessarily that we've done something wrong. It won't be nice, but we don't panic.

[25 : 24] We just think, ah, okay, this is how it's going to go then. And we remind ourselves that this is ultimately about the Lord and that He can take the hatred.

He can handle that. We remind ourselves that we are safe in the grip of our Father's care. We remind ourselves that we have the Spirit who helps us in the time of need.

What a wonderful help. Let's pray together.