

The Spirit and the World Part 1

John 15:18-27

Call: Ps 27:1-4 (NIV)

Scripture: Matt 5:3-12 (NIV)

I. Intro

Good morning! We return to our studies in the Gospel of John today. Here in the west, we mostly live to be comfortable. I know I do! I don't like anyone or anything messing with my comfort. I like being comfortable! This is partly why the pandemic has been so difficult for me, because it has messed with my comfort. As we come to our text this week in the upper room discourse, we find Jesus describing life along his way as anything but comfortable. In fact, he says that life along his way will be characterized not by comfort, rather by being hated and being persecuted. This is simply the cost of being a disciple of Jesus.

One of my heroes, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, thought long and hard about the cost of discipleship, even calling his study on the Sermon on the Mount that very name. Bonhoeffer described the cost this way:

Suffering then is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master... Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. (Bonhoeffer, 100-101).

Later Bonhoeffer would say, "When Christ calls a person, he bids them come and die." That doesn't sound so inviting! It sounds discouraging! So, how are we face this suffering and hatred and persecution? Answer: With the help of the paraclete, the Holy Spirit. Let's pray.

Review

As we talked about last week, we are now on the back half of this great upper room discourse. In the first half, love was particularly a theme, especially between Jesus and the disciples. In this second, half, hate emerges as a theme, especially from the world toward the disciples.

So, I invite you into our text this morning, John 15, beginning in verse 18.

II. The Hatred (15:18-21)

18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 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. 20 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. 21 But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. (ESV)

A. The World

Two words particularly stand out in these verses: world and hate. It's important to be reminded again what John means by the word *world* in his Gospel. We talked about it in the early parts of John, especially in John 3:16-17, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17)*. What John means by this word "world" is, "human society organizing itself without God." "World" for John is human existence resisting, rejecting and rebelling against the living God. We've already seen an example of this rejection in the upper room, haven't we? Judas rejected Jesus' offer of love and service, and then went out into the darkness of night.

B. The Hate

So, if the world resists, rejects and rebels against God, the world *"hates"* Jesus, who is God incarnate. The world hates Jesus and anything connected to Jesus' name. As we have said before, name in scripture signifies character. The world resists, rejects and rebels against Jesus and everything the name of Jesus stands for. This means everyone that follows the Jesus way will be hated, and everyone that lives the character of Jesus will be hated.

I don't think I need to provide any examples here do I? But, I remember taking a religious studies course at Penn State in my undergraduate studies, and when the class got to Christianity, the professor wouldn't even teach it. He made a student teach it, then ridiculed and mocked that student as the majority of the class did the same.

Everyone who belongs to Jesus will be hated just as Jesus was hated. Because the branch abides in the vine, branches will experience the same hate that the vine experiences. "Plan on it," Jesus says. "You're not of the world, you've been chosen out of the world and therefore will be hated." As Paul told the church in Corinth, *"the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance"* (2 Cor 1:5).

C. The Contrast

Notice the stark contrast here. The world will be known by their hatred of Jesus. The world lives and moves and has their being from within this context, the hatred of Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus' disciples will be known by their love. Disciples live and move and have their being from within the love of Jesus. We love because he first loved us. This means the church and the world are driven by distinct loyalties, operating under different orders, acting from opposing values and ultimately heading in opposite directions. The world and Jesus' disciples are polar opposites.

D. The Narrow Way

Now, this is certainly not a cause for arrogance or self-glorification. And we certainly shouldn't go looking for hatred or persecution. This is simply a recognition that God has revealed himself through Jesus, and anything which cannot be reconciled with this truth is in error. This is simply the narrow way of Jesus. By saying Jesus is Lord of my life, by definition, will mean I will be at odds with the world.

Yet in our world, the call to conform is very, very strong isn't it? It's so easy in our world to be conformed to our world and not to Christ. This is why Paul says in Romans, "*Do not be conformed to this world*" (Rom 12:2). In other words, do not be squeezed into its mold! Be squeezed into Christ's mold.

Os Guinness once said, "In the modern world, most Christians look no different than their pagan neighbors" (Guinness, 55). May that not be us! We have a different loyalty. We have different orders. We have a different set of values, and we are heading in a different direction. And, because of that, we are mutually exclusive from the world. We are in the world but we are also mutually exclusive from it. And, simply because we identify with Jesus, the world resents us and persecutes us.

But, why? Why would anyone hate Jesus? Why would anyone not want to know Jesus? Here is love incarnate! Here is goodness incarnate! Here is someone who heals, who loves, who cares, who brings people back from the dead. Here is someone who does not lie or steal or lust or slander. Why would anyone hate him? The next verses explain, verses 22-25.

III. The Reasons for the Hatred (15:22-25)

22 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. 23 Whoever hates me hates my Father also. 24 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. 25 But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.' (ESV)

A. Introduction

Why does the world hate Jesus and all he stands for? Jesus gives three reasons here.

1. The Exposure (of sin)

First of all, because he, as the light of the world, exposes their sin. When he arrives, Jesus illuminates all the evil within the darkness. Jesus is not saying here that if he hadn't come there would be no sin. The world is already a sinful place before he arrives on the scene. Ever since the fall, humanity has been committing sin against God. But, not until he comes into the world is the world's evil challenged. No one else can challenge the world's evil like Jesus. He is the sinless one (1 Pet 2:22). As Don Carson says, "Jesus is so pure that dirty men [and women] must either get cleaned up or else loathe his purity" (Carson, 121). Jesus is so pure that the world is now robbed of every excuse when confronted by him, the light of the world. And, they hate him for it.

2. The Lack of Recognition

Secondly, the world hates because they've seen his good works, verse 24, and yet failed to recognize God in them. In this Gospel, Jesus' works are turning water into wine, his healings, the feeding of the 5,000 and the raising of Lazarus. These mighty deeds reveal the character and power of God. The world saw them and should have recognized that

Jesus was revealing the living God in those deeds. But, in their eyes, they can't come to terms with God in the flesh, and they hate him for it.

3. The Purposes (of God)

And, lastly, the world hates but it fulfills God's purposes as stated in Psalm 69, "*They hated me without a cause*" (Ps 69:4). All the hostility toward him and his followers is actually within the purposes of God. This is to say that God's purposes will not be thwarted. They "will be accomplished not only through his perfection and love, but even despite the world's ... hate" (Klink, 670).

So, three reasons for the world's hatred of Jesus, which spills over onto his followers.

B. The Disciple's Response?

At this point, I wonder what those first disciples were thinking? Not only were they confused, fearful and anxious, as we have talked about in previous weeks, now I bet they're feeling hopeless and discouraged. I bet some of them even threw up their hands in despair as if to say – Jesus, what are we supposed to do? How are we to survive in this world with all of this hate and persecution, especially if you're going away?

That brings us to the culmination of our passage, verses 26 and 27.

IV. The Witness of the Paraclete (26-27)

26 "But when the Helper [paraclete] 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. 27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. (ESV)

A. The Paraclete

I'm sure the disciples say, "Of course, the Paraclete! The Holy Spirit will come to help us!" And, with this mention of the paraclete, it would bring to the disciple's minds (and hopefully ours) Jesus' previous teaching that:

- The paraclete will come to be with them (and us), and in them (and us) forever (John 14:15-17). They (and us) are never alone.
- And, the paraclete will be just like the presence of Jesus with them (and us) and in them (and us) forever, because he is "*another of the same kind*" (John 14:16).
- And, the paraclete will bring the peace of Jesus to them (and us) in the midst of the hostility (John 14:27).

How can disciples, then and now, face confusion, anxiety and fear in the midst of hate and persecution? With the help of the paraclete, the Holy Spirit, the one called in alongside, who is with us and in us, permanently.

B. The Witness of the Paraclete

And not only will the presence of the paraclete help us in the midst of hate and persecution, we find out here another primary function of the paraclete. The paraclete, the Holy Spirit, will bear witness about Jesus.

The world resists Jesus and resists us. The world rejects Jesus and rejects us. The world hates Jesus and hates us. The world where we live today seems to be so strong against Jesus and us, and we wonder how we will break through all the resistance? How do we break through? Answer: We don't. We don't break through. In fact, we cannot break through! But, the Paraclete can, and the paraclete does break through. And, that's what Jesus really wants us to get in this text. The paraclete is present in every situation, and he can break through. Jesus wants us to realize this as we walk through our daily lives here in the Bay Area, the paraclete is there, and he can break through.

Yes, we also bear witness as Jesus says in verse 27. And, how do we primarily bear witness? We primarily bear witness by what Jesus commands elsewhere, we *"love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us,"* (Matt 5:44). We love even those who frustrate us, those who don't like us, and those who want to do us harm. That's how we witness. *"We overcome evil with good,"* as Paul will say in Romans (Rom 12:21). That's our primary witness.

But what Jesus is emphasizing here is not our witness. Jesus is emphasizing here the paraclete's witness! He, the paraclete, is the one who will break through the resistance, rejection, rebellion and hate. In any situation, in the home or the office or the school, the paraclete is at work. And, he's working to testify to the truth of Jesus.

What a relief? We're not the ones who must break through to the world. This is the work of the paraclete. He is the great evangelist! Yes, we are to bear witness, we are to love and do good, but our witness is a joining of forces with him. We join him in his witness.

I think Leslie Newbigin says it best. Newbigin was a missionary to the Hindus in India for many, many years, where there was a lot of hate and persecution. He says this:

It is important here to note what is not said. It is not said that the Spirit will help the disciple to bear witness [although Jesus does say that elsewhere (Acts 1:8)]. That would make the action of disciples primary and that of the Spirit auxiliary. What is said is that the Spirit will bear witness, and that secondarily the disciples are witnesses. The Gospel repeatedly affirms that it is not the work of men and women, but of God to bring people to the knowledge of Jesus as he truly is. To know Jesus as Lord can never be the work of flesh and blood. It's always a miracle of God's grace and never the direct result of even the most impressive proclamation. For no one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws him or her... The Spirit is not the church's auxiliary. The promise [here] is that the mighty Spirit of God will bear his own witness to the crucified Jesus as the Lord and giver of life!

Do you see how this transforms our situations. Long before we say or do anything, the paraclete is already there, on the job. The paraclete is always already at work, out there doing

his thing quite apart from us. We tend to think that evangelism only happens when we show up. Not so! The great evangelist is already there ahead of us! The privilege we are given is joining him in his already-well-on-its-way task. We are not bringing conviction of faith. He is.

C. The Paraclete in Scripture

And, isn't this what we see throughout Acts particularly? Many people call Acts, Acts of the Apostles. In one sense, that's correct, but it really should be Acts of the Spirit shouldn't it? Acts is not primarily a narrative of the acts of Jesus' apostles, but primarily the acts of Jesus' Spirit. It's the Spirit that brought about conviction on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It's the Spirit who leads Stephen to speak the truth (Acts 7). It's the Spirit who breaks through to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8) and the Spirit who breaks through to Saul (Acts 9) and Cornelius (Acts 10), and so forth. Acts is primarily the acts of the Holy Spirit.

Long before we come on the scene, the Spirit is already there bearing witness to Jesus, making Jesus real and attractive to people. This is why Darrell Johnson can explain evangelism like this, "Evangelism is listening in on a conversation the Holy Spirit is having with another person, and only speaking if the Spirit or the person asks." As we go about our days, at home or at work or in the classroom or on the bus or on the airplane, this is what's happening all around us. The Spirit is having conversations with us and with others. And when we listen carefully, we can sometimes hear this conversation, and are sometimes given the privilege of entering into the conversation. I think this transforms everyday of our life.

V. Conclusion

Yes, life along the Jesus way can be uncomfortable. Jesus knows it and out of his love, prepares us for it. Because we are connected to him, we will get persecuted just like he did. But, we have His Spirit with us and in us to help us. But, we also can count on him to be bearing witness to Jesus even when we are not present. Yes, in the midst of all the hostility, we love and do good. But, the Spirit is already there and at work breaking through all the hostility. Amen.

VI. Reflection

We're going to close with a reflection this morning to hopefully bring this text into our world. I want you to close your eyes and transport yourself in your mind to where you spend the bulk of your time throughout each week. Maybe it's your house or a classroom or a boardroom or an office or a studio or a construction site or a restaurant or an airport. Wherever it is, put yourself in that place right now.

Now that you are there at that place, ask yourself what you know to be true about that place? As you look around that place, what is going on? Take in all the data of being there and ask yourself what is happening.

Now, as I consider the Gospel of John, I think this Gospel has helped us understand better what is happening in our places. And, I can name at least four things that I know to be true in those places:

1. I know that the people we interact with in those places are, like me, trying to figure out life and trying to make sense of life. We've seen this in this Gospel with the woman at the well, and the lame man, and the official and the blind man and Mary, Martha and Lazarus and others. They are all trying to make sense of life. Likewise, the people we interact with in our places are trying to make the best of life in light of everything they know at any given moment. Some are moving forward, some are moving backward, some may be moving backward big time, but everyone, for the most part, is seeking to make sense of their existence.
2. I know that the great enemies of life are at work in our places and situations. I know that sin, evil and death are at work in all of those situations. We of course have seen that throughout this Gospel. And, that is why there is so much frustration and disappointment and confusion and sickness and pain everywhere. And, that is also why there is sin and injustice and jealousy and lust and power-grabbing and hatred and persecution everywhere. Sin, evil and death are at work in every place where we work and live. There are powers at work in this world moving against Jesus and all his name stands for.
3. I know that sin, evil and death do not have the last word in any of these situations. Sometimes it appears they do and sometimes it feels they do. But, things are not always as they appear. They do not have the last word. They are strong foes, but they are defeated foes. We saw that with the woman at the well and the lame man and the woman caught in adultery. We saw that at the grave of Lazarus, and ultimately, we will see it in Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. Through that sequence of events, Jesus has defeated sin, evil and death and sits on the throne of the universe. He has not abolished them yet, but one day he will. But, for now, because of that sequence of events, the grip of sin is broken, the grip of evil is broken and the grip of death is broken. They are defeated foes. They no longer have the last word in any of our situations, in any of the places that we work and live.
4. And, #4, I know from this upper room discourse, that we are not alone in any of our situations. We are never alone in any of the places we work and live. There is a presence in all of our situations. There is a person bigger and stronger and wiser and more loving and more just than any other person in our situations. The paraclete is there. The Holy Spirit, who is just like the presence of Jesus, is there, in every situation. And, the paraclete is not just there, he is at work there in every situation. He is on the job there in every situation bearing witness to Jesus.

That is the great truth from our text today, the Spirit is at work in Jesus' disciples, but he is also at work outside of Jesus' disciples. The Paraclete is doing this everywhere – not only in us out there, but also in the world out there. The paraclete, quite apart from us, is at work out there. This is what I know about your situation and my situation. This is what I know to be true about every place where we work and live. In the midst of a society which resists, rejects and rebels against God, how do we testify? How do we break through the resistance, rejection and rebellion? We do not. We cannot break through. But, the paraclete can and does break through. That's the Good News. Amen!

Benediction

If you would like prayer this morning, there will be pastors and elders up here who would love to pray with you.

Now receive this benediction:

The Spirit of the living God is with you and in you.

He will never leave you or forsake you.

So, Go and begin listening in on the conversations he is having with you and with others and, speak if you are asked by him or by the other person.

Amen. Go in peace.

Resources

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Burge, Gary, *The Anointed Community*

Carson, Don, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Klink, Edward, *John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)

Newbigin, Leslie, *The Light Has Come*