

Hatred

John 15:18-16:4

Key Verse: 15:18

“If the world hates you, keep in mind it hated me first.”

Unless you’ve had your head in the ground, you may know that this year is a presidential election year. We’ve got politicians battling it out trying to become the President of the United States. Last week, Illinois held its primary, where candidates from the individual parties run against each other to determine who will run against the candidate from the other party. On the Republican side, Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, and Ron Paul were the major candidates. During the campaigning and debates, each candidate pounces on the others because of differences. If someone has a different opinion, then they must be wrong. It’s a common rhetoric that we all seem to fall into. People have a natural tendency not to trust what is different. In fact, many times we will discredit something that differs from our opinion as outright wrong. We don’t like what is different and many times, we will seek to destroy what is different from what we understand. All you have to do is look at the history of hate crimes in this country from the killing of the natives to the civil rights movement and the residue that sticks today. For all the differences that we have from one another, we have some commonality in that we like to do things our way and not God’s way and we call that sin. When God’s way is presented to us, it is so different to us in our sin that we primarily react in hatred – hatred to God and those who live in God’s way. That’s just the darkness of humanity and the darkness can never understand.

As we’ve mentioned in the past few weeks, since chapter 13 John’s gospel has been about Jesus’ last night on earth. Jesus had been giving his final instructions and words of comfort before Judas would come with the soldiers to arrest Jesus. In just the last passage that we went through, Jesus talked to his disciples about remaining in him to bear fruit that lasts. Bob talked a lot remaining and the fruit that comes out of it, but one of the strongest reasons why Jesus had to remind his disciples to remain in him are the first words of this passage, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.” (18) Jesus was giving his disciples a warning. Because they were following him, the world might not like it. This might sound really strange to some of us. When we meet Jesus our lives are supposed to change and the hurt and pain that we feel are supposed to be lifted from our souls. We’re supposed to have incomparable joy in our lives because of what Jesus has done for us, but Jesus tells his disciples that hatred might be coming. Dark times could very well be ahead for them. You see, being a Christian is not about sunshine and puppy dogs. Jesus does give joy, but it is a joy that transcends circumstances. It is a joy that we have when there is sunshine; it is a joy that we have when it is raining; it is a joy that we have when a violent storm comes into our lives. It is in these darker times that we have to remember to remain in Jesus.

Now, one of the most obvious questions is, “Why does the world hate the disciples or believers?” Jesus answers this question very nicely, “If you belonged 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. That is why the world hates you.” (19) Going back to the idea in the introduction, people like others that are similar to them. We like people who have the same interests, the same style of living, the same tastes in food, and the same favorite movies. We are social creatures that like sharing things with others, but when things are different, we are honestly skeptical. I love sci-fi movies and TV shows. For you skeptics, I agree that there is a lot of low-grade junk out there, but there are real gems too like Star Wars, the Lord of the Rings, many of the superhero movies, like the latest Batman series. I love the grandiose-ness of these movies. There is such a large scale and a wonderful interplay of good and evil. I really enjoy them, but there are a lot

of people that don't like sci-fi whatsoever. Personally, I think that they are just nuts. I honestly don't know why some people just don't like it. I am very skeptical of these people, and they are probably pretty skeptical about me. Now, this is just a small example, but when the topic is life and death and the way you live, then people become even more guarded. When it's personal, then people are very defensive. There are people who take sci-fi way too seriously and have heated battles concerning Star Wars vs. Star Trek, but all those people are nuts, too. The real fact is that when something runs contrary to our way of living, we really don't like it and many times attack back.

When Jesus said, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own," (19) he was referring to this fact. The world lives apart from God. When you look at culture, our culture or foreign culture it doesn't matter, you'll notice that God is left out of the picture when it comes to living. It's all about what we can do. It's all about what we can do to gain righteousness or happiness or some measure of greatness. It's either about the good outweighing the bad, or gaining some level of enlightenment, or just going out, having fun and having everything that you want. When we live this way, as the world lives, the world doesn't have a problem with us. We're one of them. We are going on the same path and there is no issue. Other people see us as their sis or bro and we're tight with them. However, if this is not the way that we are following, then the demeanor actually changes.

Jesus said, "As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." (19) When Jesus came to the world, he gave us an opportunity to live in a different way. He shows us a life where it is not about what we can do, but what God has done. Jesus came to shift our point of view from an overtly selfish one, either culturally selfish or individually selfish, to one that keeps our focus on God. To a Christian, life is not about us, or what we can do. Life is not about our own personal elevation. Life is about God's elevation and his glory and honor. Life is about God and that is very offensive to a lot of people. Those who are not Christian find this offensive because they want to live life their own way, but Jesus shows us that apart from him we could do nothing. (15:5) Then there are the legalist Christians, who try to make people follow all the rules. They find this gospel offensive, too, because the gospel says that we are saved by grace and not by works. You see, we all want to be God instead of listening to God, but Jesus' words are offensive because they don't give us any excuse. Jesus said, "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." (22) Jesus coming and showing people that he was God removed all excuses that people could hide behind. We are not God, Jesus is, and that is very offensive to every one of us.

This can be kind of discouraging. Who wants to be hated? Who wants to walk a path you have to live in fear thinking that there might be someone who wants to kill you around the corner? It is really a hard thing to hear, but Jesus is telling his disciples this so that they won't be caught off guard and fall away. (16:1) If these times come and people do hate you, then there is something to remember. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." (18) If there is persecution, if there is hatred toward Christians, then we have to remember whom we follow. Before any Christian was persecuted, Christ was persecuted. In the book of John the first reference to someone wanting to kill Jesus is in chapter 5 when after he healed a man who was paralyzed for thirty-eight years. Jesus healed on the Sabbath, the Lord's day of rest, and he called God his Father and the religious leaders really didn't like that because they thought he was being blasphemous by equating himself to God. In chapter 9, when Jesus heals a man born blind, the religious leaders again become inflamed because of

healing on the Sabbath and undermining their authority through his word. Jesus called them thieves and the people wanted to stone him. In just a short time from our current passage, the religious leaders would arrest Jesus and place him on a secret trial. They would find him guilty of blasphemy and urged the Romans to have him crucified. The Romans tried hard to keep their distance, but the religious leaders riled up the crowd to have them call for Jesus' crucifixion. In just a few hours from this point in time, Jesus would be beaten, bloodied, his flesh ripped off, his hands nailed to a piece of wood with nails the size of railroad spikes. He was lifted up for all to see, spat on, mocked, and insulted in every which way. He could not breathe unless he lifted himself up on the nails causing him more pain than we could imagine. Nobody treats a person like this unless that person is truly hated.

That is how they treated the person we decided to follow. We call Jesus our Lord and master, and that is what the world did to our Lord and master. If they world did that to our Lord, should we expect any less? Jesus said, "Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also." (20) All of this is a great warning for the people who decide to follow Jesus. The world won't like you and in fact, Jesus says, "They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God." (16:2) Not long after Jesus died and rose from the dead, his disciples were persecuted. As recorded in the book of Acts the religious leaders arrested and imprisoned the apostles a number of times for preaching about Jesus. In Acts 7, a young man named Stephen was stoned for his beliefs and another young man named Saul approved of it. This Saul would go from city to city searching out for Christians in order to have them arrested and killed, and he thought he was doing God a favor.

And it wasn't just in this early part of the new church. Peter was beaten and sentenced to death a few times. When it came time for him to die, he didn't think that he was worthy to be crucified in the way Jesus was and requested to be crucified upside down. His brother Andrew was crucified and hung on the cross for two day, all the while preaching about the love and grace of Jesus. The young man Saul that I just mentioned became Christian and powerful one at that. In his life, he was flogged five times, beaten with rods three times, and stoned and left for dead. He, too, was murdered for what he believed. In fact, all of the early church leaders were murdered, except the author of this gospel, and that wasn't for a lack of trying. John was imprisoned in Rome and sentenced to be placed in a plot of boiling oil in the Colosseum. We usually call being boiled in oil deep-frying. The Romans tried to kill John by deep-frying him, but he didn't even suffer any harm and when the entire Colosseum, who came to witness the frying, saw what happened to John, they actually came to believe in Jesus. John's God must be the real God. After that, the Roman government exiled him to the island of Patmos off the coast of Ephesus because even when they tried to kill him, John was still able to bring people to Jesus, so they thought that putting John on an island by himself would stop him from spreading the gospel.

This level of hatred is not something reserved for only the dark early times of the church. It is estimated that more Christians have been killed in the past 100 years than in the previous 1900. That may be hard for us to believe because of the country that we live in. In the United States, we have freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the right to assemble. We are free to worship and follow Jesus without the government shutting us down. In fact, the most persecution anyone will ever see while living in this country is maybe being insulted and belittled by someone for our beliefs. I don't want to diminish what anyone is going through

because being insulted does hurt, but compared with what is going on around the world the persecution that we will ever see.

For the past two years, our ministry has participated in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Last November, we prayed for the people in God's church in countries where just being a Christian caused people to be harmed or killed. According to the law of a number of Muslim countries, it is illegal and punishable by death to convert from Islam to Christianity. In fact, right now there is a pastor in Iran named Yousef who is sentenced to die because he used to be Muslim. His entire trial centered around proving that he was a Muslim as an adult. If Youcef never professed Islam as an adult, then he would not be guilty. As it were, he was found guilty and is waiting to be murdered for his faith. In India, you are free to worship, but it is illegal to convert anyone from Hindu. If a person does profess faith in Jesus, it is usually the family that is first to act. New Christians are sometimes beaten, set on fire and murdered by their own family because they now believe that Jesus is God. In parts of Indonesia, it is not uncommon for people to storm a church and set it ablaze. There are some truly tragic pictures of what people are going through all over the world, but we are so isolated from it.

Whether our persecution is minor, like we have in the United States, or brutal, like in the Middle East, south Asia, and parts of Africa, we should really wonder how we should react. To answer this, we go back to the beginning of this passage to what Jesus said. "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." (18) If the world hates you, if the world is persecuting you, then we have to keep in mind that the world persecuted Jesus first. These words serve as a warning for us to not be surprised when persecution comes knocking on our door, but they also serve as words of comfort because we are in good company in our persecution. Jesus was persecuted, and how did that turn out for him? Jesus was beaten, bloodied, hung on a tree, and died a terrible death, but did it end there? Looking ahead a chapter, Jesus says at the end of chapter 16, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (16:33) Jesus overcame the world. He died on the cross, but he did not stay dead. You'll hear more about this next week at Witness Jesus, so I won't go into too great of detail, but on the third day after his death, Jesus rose from the dead and conquered the power of sin and death. Jesus became the pure and blameless sacrifice that was needed to wash us clean and his resurrection conquers the power of sin and death so that we no longer have to be burdened by fear of death and shame for who we are. First Corinthians 15 has these words, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

It is tremendously encouraging to know what Jesus has done for us. It is tremendously encouraging to know that we don't have to be afraid because Jesus has gone ahead of us and already won the victory over those who want to destroy his work. People can destroy our physical bodies, but they cannot take our salvation from sin and death. Most of the original apostles were murdered for their faith, but they held on to their faith to the end because of what Jesus had already done for them. When a person first accepts Jesus, there is a great liberation of the heart because we realize that Jesus has forgiven our sins. He has taken our blame, guilt and shame on the cross and given us new life. When we realize that, we become a lot like the Samaritan woman in chapter 4 in that we can't help but talk about Jesus to people. The joy and

freedom that we experience overflows and we begin to talk to others about what Jesus has done in our lives. We testify to who Jesus is. However, there is a danger that when we see push back from other people concerning Jesus, we will want to stop and be quiet. But, in those circumstances it is imperative that we don't stop talking about Jesus.

Jesus says in this chapter, "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." (26-27) Jesus said that he will give us the Holy Spirit to enable us to continue to share Jesus with others. We shouldn't let push back or persecution stop us from singing the song of Christ that our hearts want to sing. In Acts 4, Peter and John are before the Jewish ruling council. The Jews didn't like these men preaching about Jesus and they warned them not to do so again. When they went back to the rest of the believers, they prayed, not for the persecution to be lifted, but they prayed, "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." (Acts 4:29-30) Peter, John and the rest of the apostles prayed to be even bolder in sharing Jesus with others. Like I said earlier, Andrew was so compelled to share Jesus that he even preached the gospel on the cross for two days. John was deep-fried publicly and everyone who saw him come out unharmed was won over to Jesus. The government was so freaked out that they couldn't stop John from sharing Jesus that they sent him to an island by himself, but even that didn't work, because he wrote the book of Revelation. When the man Saul, who later changed his name to Paul, was imprisoned in Rome, he would routinely share Jesus with his guards and won many of them over to Jesus. Each of these men was not forced to testify; they were compelled.

When hardship, persecution, and hatred come, and they may come in varying measure, it is so important for us to remember Jesus. It is so important for us to remain in him. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing, so we need Jesus and the Holy Spirit to help us endure and grow in our faith. It's very good that Jesus gave us this warning. We won't be surprised when people turn around and hate us. It is also very good that he reminds us that we aren't alone in persecution. Jesus was hated first, but Jesus overcame and won the victory. We live in a sheltered and privileged country and will never see a level of persecution beyond insults, but it is imperative that we do not forget those who are under great duress. We have the privilege to pray for them and help them and their families through the hatred. We should never forget that. We should never forget his people or the victory that Jesus has already won.