

STUDY 5 – JOHN 15:17-16:4

So far in these chapters Jesus has been very positive, letting his disciples know about the benefits of his departure and encouraging them on to fruitfulness, which is possible and expected if they remain in him. Now Jesus speaks of the cost and the hardships his disciples will face left in the world after he returns to his Father. So far Jesus has not spelled this out (16:4), but now Jesus warns and prepares them so they don't fall apart at the first sign of opposition (16:1).

Like all the teaching in these chapters Jesus is firstly speaking to his 11 disciples and as he says here has direct application to them. They are the ones who had been with him from the beginning of his ministry (15:27). They are the ones who will definitely face violent opposition once the Spirit comes at Pentecost and they take the gospel from Jerusalem outwards. However, like the rest of these chapters, this section also has application to all disciples everywhere in every time. If we are Christians, if we are united to Christ, we need to be prepared for opposition. Sometimes this will be violent and physical. Sometimes it will be very low key (if God chooses to let us live in a time and place favourable to the gospel). More than any time in recent memory we need to study this passage and take in what Jesus is saying. We may be moving from a period of no opposition to the gospel to a period of lots of opposition, so we need to be prepared and recognise that this is not unusual. In fact, it is the norm.

There is a contrast in this passage between those who are the "world" (15:18), and "you" (the disciples, the branches on the vine remember the last study). In John's gospel "world" is used not to speak of our planet, but of human beings in opposition to God. The world is who we are by nature, rebels against God. The wonderful thing is the God loves the world and sent his Son (John 3:16 – an amazing verse not because the world is big, but because it is so bad).

The world will hate Christians (verse 18) - the word hate is deliberately strong, and implies a persecuting abhorrence, a desire to get rid of Christians. This may not manifest itself all the time (notice the "if" in verse 18), but Jesus is implying it is the usual common attitude of the world. The reason for this hatred is not because we are uncool, or anything to do with our presentation skills, but because we do not belong to them anymore. We belong to Christ – we are part of him, the vine. We have his Spirit in us (remember 14:15-21). We serve him, not our own desires. The world loves conformity to its own way – the way of sin and rebellion and self centredness, and hates anyone who is different who serves and belongs to God and worships Christ.

The proof of this will be seen in the last few chapters of John's gospel. Jesus will be tried, convicted and put to death by the world (a collection of people from different background united in their hatred of him). If that is how the world treats Christ, then we should expect that is how they will treat those who are united to him (Verse 20-22).

It is important we grasp this. Often we think that it is the church that people dislike, but actually people respect Jesus. We feel that if only we could present Christ in an acceptable way then we would be accepted. But the truth is it is Christ that people hate. We will never gain full acceptance in this world – whether it is in academia or politics or the media or with our particular group we mix with. We are tempted to soften the gospel so people will get to know Christ. But this does not work and is a denial of Jesus.

The real issue is that Jesus Christ exposes the sin of the world and this makes people uncomfortable, to the point of anger and persecution (Verse 22-25). Jesus shows up the fact that we are guilty of sin. These verses are not saying that sin does not exist before Jesus reveals it. The town Jesus preached and performed miracles in were full of sinners even before he came. But as Jesus lived and preached and performed miracles he showed that they were sinners, and revealed their greatest sin – that of rebellion against the Father because they did not worship the Son. People's reaction against Jesus, the Son, revealed what they thought about the Father. As we tell people about Jesus and live amongst them, their reaction to Jesus reveals what their relationship is to God. The really sad truth is this anger and hatred is unnecessary. It is "without reason" (15:25). Jesus has come to save, and has come for sinners. But this reaction is not outside of God's control, in fact it has been prophesied in the Old Testament (15:25).

What should our reaction be then? Should we just keep our head down and try and blend in? No. Jesus is sending his Spirit into his disciples to testify about him in the world (15:26). So our role is to speak of Christ, fully aware that there will be a mixture of responses. (15:27)

The last really shocking thing that Jesus says about this persecution is that it will come not simply from those who are not religious and obviously haters of God, but it will come from those who claim to know God (16:2-4). It will come from fruitless branches who claim to belong to the vine, but who don't because they don't know Christ. Some of the most brutal persecution will come from those who say they know God. This obviously includes members of other religions, but in the context (and thinking about the book of Acts) it includes those who claim to worship the one true God but who deny Christ. The Pharisees, Sadducees and others who persecuted the apostles as the gospel spread. Today this would include those within the visible church who are in position of influence but do not know Christ as he is revealed in the Bible. There are many stories of evangelical Christians persecuted by those within the church who deny the reality of sin etc etc.

This passage is here to warn and prepare us (16:1, 4). It is written so we do not scatter at the first sign of difficulty. But we can be comforted that when these difficulties come we don't face them alone. We face them united to Christ, the vine, knowing the Father through him, having the Holy Spirit in us.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Who are the "world" that Jesus is speaking about in these verses? (Look back to John 14:17, 23-24 for help)

Why does the world hate Jesus' disciples? (Verse 19)

Why should we not be surprised at this hatred (Verses 18, 20-21)?

Why did the world hate Jesus (Verse 21-25)?

"People like Jesus, it's just the church they've got a problem with" How would you respond to that statement?

If we forget that the world, left to itself (i.e. without the transforming work of the Spirit) hates Jesus, what might we be tempted to do? *This question is meant to tease out our temptation to make the*

gospel acceptable to those around us, by for example making our worship services more like contemporary entertainment. The music we play isn't the reason people don't become Christians – it's because by nature we hate Jesus.

Is this opposition out of God's control? (Verse 25)

If all this is true, should we just hide away? Why not? (Verse 26-27)

Where will some of this opposition come from? Can you think of examples of this? (16:2-3)

Why is Jesus telling us this? (16:1, 4)