

September 1, 2019

John 15:18-16:4

"It's Good to Be Hated"

Who is harder to love? Someone you like or someone you don't like? Hands down the second one. There are people who come in and out of your life that, upon further review, you really don't like. While humorist Will Rogers is best remembered for having said, "I never met a man I didn't like," we all know someone who clearly would have caused him to change his mind.

The incredible thing is God, in Jesus Christ, challenges us to love likeable and unlikeable people. Here's the distinction I make. There will be people I don't like. None of them are a part of Covenant Church {just in case you were wondering}. But there are people I would never choose to hang around with. There are people I just don't like. Here's the distinction...and Jesus demands I make this distinction. If I saw someone I knew and didn't like lying in a ditch, in need of help, I would have no choice but to help. Jesus commands me to choose to help. I still don't have to like that person. But I am commanded to help. I hope that makes sense.

As we pivot from the first half of chapter 15 to the second half, check-out one of the fastest turn-arounds in the Bible.

In John 15:17, Jesus says, "These things I command you, so that you love one another."

In John 15:18, Jesus says, "If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you."

From love to hate in just a few words. The word *hate* is used seven times in this section.

The reality is, in some subtle and not-so-subtle ways, the world is going to hate you because you are a follower of Jesus Christ. Paul says as much in

Romans 12:2:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

When you don't try to fit in...when you don't go with the flow...when you don't choose the path of least resistance, people will look at you differently. In fact, some will resent you and even a few will hate you for it.

Most of the time, the resentment and even hatred that some have for Christians is expressed in very subtle ways. Christians are mocked and misunderstood. I've known people who were dropped from their circle of friends because of their Christian beliefs. Fortunately most people here in the United States rarely experience any kind of active persecution. We're all aware of the way Christians are persecuted in other parts of the world. It's barbaric.

People can slap those "COEXIST" bumper stickers on their cars here in America because we do. Try putting a "Come to Jesus" bumper sticker on your car in places like Iran or China, and see how long you exist. Hatred of Christians in some parts of the world drives retribution, pain, and suffering.

It's one thing for a Project Manager not to want a devoted follower of Jesus Christ on their team. That's one expression of hatred. It's another

thing to be imprisoned for ten years for teaching about Jesus.

However it's expressed, hatred for Christians is active and it's real.

Make no mistake. Some people think differently about Christians, especially conservative, evangelical Christians. Recently, someone in Tecumseh commented to an acquaintance that our church hates certain people because we are faithful to Jesus' teaching on marriage. Sometimes Christians are even treated differently.

Here are a few things to understand when facing any kind of rejection.

1. Don't take is personally.

It's human nature to take things personally. Especially when you want to fit in. Nobody wants to be rejected. Me, I don't particularly care whether someone likes me or not. Once, someone told me to my face that they didn't like me. To which I responded, "That's fine. That's your choice." That really made them mad. I suppose they were mad because I didn't care that they didn't like me? Strange worldview, but okay.

We need to be okay with not being liked by everyone. Because when you take rejection personally, it leads toward resentment and anger. And when you are bitter toward others, you can't love them the way Jesus wants you to love them. How can you be salt and light...helping to lead someone to the Savior...if you are bitter toward them? Realize they hate you because they hate Jesus. So don't take it personally. Accept it and move on.

2. Don't try to fit in.

As followers of Jesus Christ, it's impossible to fit in with the people around us. It doesn't work. Christians don't fit in. And that's okay. You don't want to fit in. I know, we live in a fitting-in culture. Undeniable. Just don't go there.

Here's something you might want to write down:

**It's never a good idea to be like everyone else so people will like
you.**

Trying to fit in doesn't work.

We don't fit in. But we do proclaim light and salt to a world that

desperately needs to hear it. So when you're facing push-back for being a Christian, don't give in. You are holy. You are light. You are salt. You are being transformed. Embrace not fitting in. Dare to be different.

Make no mistake. Our culture pushes us to fit in. We have a herd mentality. Conformity is always being pushed. Trends. Peer pressure. The way we question others or criticize them. Most criticism mostly serves to press others to conform. People have a psychological need to fit in. So Jesus says, *don't do it*. We are the salt and the light the world needs.

Don't try to fit in. You will face rejection and hatred. Accept it and move on.

3. Don't try to avoid rejection.

As Jesus says in verse 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.

It's quite simple. If it happened to Jesus, why would we think it couldn't or shouldn't happen to us? There are only two ways to conceivably avoid hatred and rejection. Don't follow Jesus or be better than Jesus. Don't waste time trying to avoid rejection. Accept it and move on.

4. Remember that rejection is not universal.

Everyone isn't going to reject you. Remember, Jesus said, "If they kept my word, they will also keep yours." In other words, Jesus tells the disciples since they kept his word, they know others will, too. The flip side to persecution is the ability to impact your little corner of the world in a way that changes lives. Let's say that together:

IF THEY KEPT MY WORD, THEY WILL ALSO KEEP YOURS.

It's like the way magnets work. If a person's heart is turning toward God, then you are going to connect with another life. But, if a person's heart is rejecting God, they will push away from you. It's as simple as that.

Rejection and hatred are real. I won't belabor the point that Christians are persecuted in other parts of the world. It happens in violent and ugly ways.

I can never say, "It's so hard being a Christian in America," because it isn't.

If anything, Christians have it so good here in America, we have to make it sound like we have it rough.

People complain that they've kicked God out of public schools - a low view of God's omnipresence - and that they've taken prayer out of public schools. Reality is, you can pray in public schools all you want. To be honest, I wouldn't want a public school teacher leading my child in prayer any more than you would want me teaching your kids math.

Do you remember, a few years ago, people were getting their tinsel all in a knot because retailers weren't saying "Merry Christmas?" I think the focus was primarily on *Macy's*. Is that really a hardship for Christians? I don't need a reminder of the true meaning of Christmas from a shopping mall, as if those who benefit most from the commercialization of a sacred event have my best spiritual interests at heart. Boy, that sounds as snarky as the first time I wrote it. I hope I'm not the only one unconcerned about what

kind of holiday greeting I get in December. I don't consider it much of a hardship.

If the world hates you because you follow Jesus, it's a good thing. It means your faith is real, and it drives you deeper into the arms of Jesus. Those are always good things.

So far, we've considered four perspectives when faced with hatred and rejection:

1. Don't take it personally.

2. Don't try to fit in.

3. Don't try to avoid rejection.

4. Remember that rejection is not universal.

The final perspective is proactive in nature:

5. I tell the truth about Jesus.

Here's how Jesus spells it out in verses 26-27:

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.

Times of persecution are times a proclamation. When you face push-back or criticism or opposition or ridicule or hatred for your faith, God is giving you an opportunity to be a witness. How you respond speaks volumes about the hope that is within you. When people throw hate at you, these are the best responses:

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control.

That's how people know who you really are and who Jesus really is. You become an example of how Jesus changes lives. Amen?

So, how do we respond to the hatred that's in the world? We can blend in. We can take it personally. We can fight back. Or we can do what Jesus did. We can tell the truth.

In the pursuit of the truth, here's a little homework:

1. Pray for persecuted believers in the most dangerous parts of the world.
2. Read through John 15 again, focusing on how God can help you to better your relationships in everyday life. Ask God to show you how He wants you to live.

May God continue to fill our hearts with love as we become different from the world in a world that so desperately needs salt and light.