

The Heart of Christ ~ the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

"...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end"(John 13:1.)

The Communing Savior

The Believer's Relationship to the World (Part 1)

John 15:18-25

John 15:18-20

18 If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

In a report given in 2002, it has been conservatively estimated that 70 million genuine followers of Jesus Christ have been killed for their professions of faith and that of that 70 million, 2/3rds of that number, or about 47 million have been martyred between 1900-2000. Again, conservative estimates are that at least 100,000 believers, about 275 per day, or about 18 in the time in which we conduct this worship service will be murdered for professing and living in the name of Jesus Christ. Are Christian's being persecuted?

During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad. Have Christian's suffered persecution?

In 374 AD, when the Emperor Valens threatened Eusebius, a bishop who taught the full divinity of Christ, with confiscation of all his goods, torture, banishment, or even death, the courageous Christian replied, "He needs not fear confiscation, who has nothing to lose; nor banishment, to whom heaven is his country; nor torments, when his body can be destroyed at one blow; nor death, which is the only way to set him at liberty from sin and sorrow." Have Christians endured persecution?

Archaeologists digging in the remains of a school for imperial pages in Rome found a picture dating from the third century. It shows a boy standing, his hand raised, worshipping a figure on a cross, a figure that looks like a man with the head of a donkey. Scrawled in the writing of a young person are the words, "Alexamenos worships his God."

Nearby in a second inscription: "Alexamenos is faithful." Apparently, his schoolmates were mocking a young man who was a Christian for his faithful witness. But he was not ashamed; he was faithful. Christians have always been persecuted.

I share these accounts to remind us of the truth of the word of God, a truth often repeated and continually revealed throughout Scripture. Paul reminds Timothy, ***"And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).*** Peter adds to this, ***"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for***

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your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12). And in some of His final words to the disciples, Jesus said to them, ***“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name” (Matthew 24:9).***

From all of this, there can be no doubt that hatred; persecution, trials and suffering are truly part and parcel of the Christian life. From the Scriptures we read and the accounts we considered it must be concluded that persecution for one's faith is not something that might happen to Christians, but is revealed as that which will happen to Christians. Such persecution will come in varying degrees. If you have lived for Christ, then you have experienced at least some kind of persecution. We need to know that there will be seasons of plentiful persecution and there will be the sparse dry spells, but beloved, the truth remains...those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted – they will be pursued, followed, hunted, press upon and caused to suffer in some degree or another.

In our text this morning, having already declared and described the believer's relationship to Himself in verses 1-11 and to one another in verses 12-17, Jesus now explains the believer's relationship to the world here in verses 18-25 and one of the key points Jesus makes in this regard is that believers will be hated and they will be persecuted. So then, in order to have His disciples prepared with how to deal with the prospect of such gloomy events, Jesus outlines some important truths to be heeded and practiced as persecution for Jesus is revealed in our lives. The understanding and application of these truths will help the believer cope with the difficulties of persecution to the glory of God. Again...let me stress, the issue here is not here is what you need to know if you are persecuted, but rather, this is what you need to know as you are being persecuted. Over the next couple of weeks we will consider this question carefully, for if the truth be told, as those who “profess” Christ, we find ourselves hard-pressed little by persecution, at least to the degree that I described just a moment ago. Sometimes this should serve as a test, a barometer or sorts by which we ask ourselves the question, if those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, and I cannot identify any persecution in my life, then it might be that I am not living godly enough, that my witness does not have the boldness and confidence for which the early church fervently prayed for in Act 4. Listen to this prayer, a prayer uttered under persecution from the religious establishment:

And now, Lord, take not of their threats, and grant that Your bond- servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.

And just what was the result of this prayer offered up in the face of trials, imprisonment and in just a few chapters over, death? We read this in Acts 4:31:

And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

Beloved, let me ask you...do you desire to pray as a church for such a boldness and confidence in the Lord that we would speak the word of God with a boldness that would rock not

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only the religious establishment, but indeed our cities, our counties and our countries? What is it that these believers knew and practiced that perhaps we are slow to understand and practice ourselves? I believe we find the answers here in John 15:18-25. And this morning I wish to draw your attention, to have you consider carefully the first of three questions I will be asking and the text will be answering. The question for this morning is very fitting the context of all that we have been studying. The question we have to ponder is nothing short of a call to put into practice the very principle of John 14:15, **"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."** If you love Jesus, you will take to heart and put into practice all that He says, realizing that even if you don't understand exactly how or why, by following the commandments of Christ, you will be blessed. So then, what is this first question we need to consider? I submit to you this question, "Do you rightly practice the commands of Christ?"

Do you rightly practice the commands of Christ? (15:18, 20)

Now then, while that may seem a bit broad, let us consider in the context of our verses, in the context of learning how to deal with persecution for Christ, specifically verses 18 and 20, just what commandments are to be practiced.

In verses 18 and 20 our Lord Jesus Christ presents us with two commands, two exhortations, and two calls. These two commands are given that we might have the means by which to deal with the potential pitfalls of persecution. Let us look at the first command as found in verse 18.

1. To "Know" (15:18)

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

If you are reading from the NASB, please take a look at the marginal reading. The form of this verb "to know" could either be rendered as a statement of fact, as it reads in the text, or it might rightly be seen as an imperative, a command, which I believe is more consistent with the context. We could read this text; **"If the world hates you, know [you must know] that it has hated Me before it hated you."** This word "know" in our text means to grow in one's understanding, to gain increasing knowledge, as opposed to having a full or comprehensive knowledge of something. As a believer, I am called to "know" to be ever growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ according to 2 Peter 3:18. The implication is that I don't know everything, but am increasing in knowledge. The opposite of this is to have a full knowledge of something, and while in theory there is no one that knows everything about a subject, we still refer to "experts" – to those who know much more and enough about a subject to make wise and sound decisions. If my car is making strange and whirling sounds from somewhere in the engine where I have no understanding of its workings, I look to the expert, the mechanic to diagnose and fix the problem.

But again, we here are called to know, that is to increase in our understanding and comprehension of some important truth...that truth being this – that as you develop in the Christian life, you are to grow in your understanding of the world's hatred of Jesus and as you come to understand the world's hatred of Jesus, you will understand why the world will hate you as His disciple.

But if this is to make sense, let us take a moment to understand the terms "world" and "hatred" The word "world" carries a couple of different concepts, sometimes referring to the mass

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of humanity that dwells on the earth and sometimes referring to a system, a way of thinking. It is this second concept that we have before us now. The term "world" here speaks of a way of thinking that is different and ultimately opposed to God's ways.

The other term to understand is "hates". The verb speaks of detesting something, to dismissing and disregarding something as unworthy of love and therefore as a waste of time. This hate, if pressed, will eventually pursue a course of persecution, which is what we see later in verse 20.

But putting these two concepts of "world" and "hates" together, let us understand that Jesus is not saying that every single person on the face of the earth openly and actively hates Him or hates believers, but rather Jesus is saying that there is a way of thinking, of living and of acting by those in the world that is opposed to and at rebellion with God's way of thinking, living and acting. The world system does not like God's system. Let me illustrate this. We have some friends that are worldly as they come. They do not know God, they do not live for God, they find their pleasure from the things in this world and their thinking rarely, if ever, is governed by the Book! And yet my family has enjoyed this other family's company; we have ministered to them and they have encouraged us in many earthly, temporal things. While they are not actively or overtly hating us, they are however caught up in a way of thinking that is opposed to God and His ways and this rebellion against God is ultimately hatred or a detesting of Jesus Christ. And so, when we have had conversations about Jesus and His word, it is at such times that these friends can feel judged or condemned, not because we are judging them, but because they realize, if only for a moment, that they are in opposition to God and His ways – that their thinking is not in line with God's thinking. So then, let us define this hatred by the world as *a system, or way of thinking that either dismisses or disdains the way and purposes of God.*

And here then Jesus says that we must "know," we must grow in our understanding of how the world system is opposed and at rebellion with Him. I believe this is so important for the believer to understand so that in the midst of persecution, in whatever forms it comes, we will not come to hate individuals who are acting against us, but rather we will come to see them as lost in a way of thinking from which they need the deliverance of God.

In this vain, consider Jesus, who having been mocked, scorned, ridiculed, beaten, flogged and nailed to a cross for crucifixion; who while hanging there in great anguish and pain, continuing to be insulted and mocked, did not look upon that crowd of sinners with hatred and disdain. He did not mentally plan for His personal vengeance against these individuals. But what did Jesus do? What did Jesus say? In Luke 23:34 we read these words of Jesus, **"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."** These were spewing hatred at Jesus and yet Jesus knew that it was because they were lost in the world, in a way, a condition of thinking that afforded them no other response. These were totally depraved, unable to respond to the goodness of Jesus, being lost in sin. For Jesus understood, Jesus knew that the battle was not against flesh and blood, but against what? According to Ephesians 6:12, **"but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places"** – or in other words, against a system of thinking that is opposed to and in rebellion against God.

What does this mean for us? Let us apply this to the upcoming presidential election. Beloved, I am no fan of either of the candidates. And while I am certainly more inclined to vote

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for one over the other because I "fear" the consequences that the "other" will take our country much more quickly down a path that will erode our personal freedoms and potential prosperity, I do not and must not "hate", despise or disdain either candidate for these do not know what they are doing. They are bound by world's way of thinking – a manner of thinking that sometimes is openly hostile to God and His ways and sometimes is covertly and subtly hostile to His ways. Their eyes cannot see the benefit of pursuing all things God's way. Their ears cannot hear the truth of God's Word. Beloved, do not fear such men as these but pity them, have compassion for them, pray for their deliverance from the world's way of thinking that God might grant them repentance. It may be that because of either one of these men serving as president that more open and hostile forms or persecution against Christians result, but we must not focus our fears or concerns on individuals – this is the way of the world, a way of thinking that poured out its wrath on Jesus Christ, a way of thinking that though it best to put Jesus to death, a way of thinking that even each one of us in here at one time or another engaged in. The way of Christ is different, calling us to love our enemies, to pray for those who are against us.

But ultimately then, Jesus begins His teaching concerning how to cope with persecution by informing the disciples that the worlds' hatred, their rebellion against the ways of thinking and living of Christians did not originate in the Christians, but it originated with Jesus. Jesus says, "If the world hates you...[meaning in effect...if you are living for Me, then the world does indeed hate you, it counts you as ignorant and uninformed], then you must "know" – you are commanded to grow in your own understanding how it is not a personal thing against you, but that it is directed first and foremost against Jesus; against His ways, His truth, His precepts.

How does this hatred manifest itself? Try to organize a Bible study at work or at school that calls people to know the truth of the gospel and see what happens. That's not tolerant! That's not politically correct! Try to speak openly and lovingly about Jesus, sin and salvation to unbelieving family or friends. Try to share your faith in one of our local shopping malls. Try to teach parents that the great reason for their children's disobedience and defiance is not because of low self-esteem, it is not because of ADD, it is not because of some disease or syndrome, but because the child is a selfish sinner that perhaps is too often allowed to get away with rebellion without consequence and without an explanation of how what he or she is doing is rebellion against God. When we try such things, it won't be long before we are scoffed at, ridiculed, yelled at, told to stop, avoided altogether. And in some countries such could lose you your job, alienate you from your family or even cost you your life. But where does the motivation and the message to communicate such things come from? It come from Jesus. Jesus called the world to repent! He called people to recognize sin! He called people to be born-again, transformed, made new. He pointed out peoples' rebellion and called them to true love. And so, who are we to think that we would not also suffer the same things from a world that hates, that despises the ways and purposes of God?

And beloved, let us be careful that this attitude of the world does not find itself in our thinking. It is too easy to let the ways and purposes of the world to dictate to us how we ought to live. And quite frankly the world's way of thinking as revealed in our culture right now is this – its okay to be religious, its okay to believe what you want to believe, but you have no right to communicate that to others. But wait, Jesus said that we would be His witnesses, that we would be His ambassadors, that we would be His royal priesthood and a people for His own possession

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so that we may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness, out of sin, out of immorality, out of adultery, out of lying, out of stealing, out of hatred, out of self-centeredness, out of laziness, out of looking for answers apart from God's Word, out of the way of thinking that is according to and governed by the world, communicated by Hollywood or legislated by Congress, out of pride, out of all such things and into His marvelous light – His truth, His ways, His kingdom, in peace, mercy, grace, goodness and love.

We are called to "know" such things, to grow in the understanding of how the world's ways are at odds with God's ways; to make sure that we are not following such ways and to make sure that we do not hate individuals for hating us or for hating Christ.

Now I know it seems we have spent a lot of time on this and that I have left little time for our second and final point, but this second command simply flows and is an application of the first command. It is a call....

2. To "Remember" (15:20)

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

The second command is a call to remember. The word "remember" speaks of exercising the memory. It is not simply about remembering a fact, but also then of mulling such facts over in the mind, allowing them to sink in deeply so that you might recall them for constant use. And just what truth does Jesus want His disciples to remember, we see it there in verse 20, "A slave is not greater than his master."

Simply put, what Jesus is saying is this, there are no exceptions to the rule of persecution. While Jesus bore all our reproach before the Father for our salvation, it is also true that Jesus, for the purposes of our benefit, allows us to share in His sufferings. There is something about sufferings and persecutions that causes the believer to seek more earnestly sanctification, wanting to be more holy and more like Christ. The point is this, if Jesus, our Lord, who infinitely greater than us, suffered for the cause of righteousness and His kingdom, then we need not think that we are exempt. Interestingly enough, this is a great theme of the book of 1 Peter. This is why Jesus told those who proposed to follow Him that to follow meant a cross; to die to self. Following Jesus is not about a life of ease; it is not about a life of prosperity, although God may grant such things. Following Jesus is becoming like Jesus, it is about Jesus, it is revealing Jesus and as we reveal Jesus, we are told we engender hatred from the world, opposition at times from our own families, and suffering for the cause of Christ.

Beloved, what kind of expectation do you have when it comes to following Jesus? Some would have us believe that following Jesus allows us to name and claim whatever it is that we want or desire. If we are suffering, if we are at a loss, it is, to these, an issue of faith. But Jesus said here, to follow Him whole-heartedly is to invite persecution.

Some would have us believe that following Jesus is nothing more than fire insurance and that we can live our lives however we like so long as we walked an aisle, prayer a prayer, attend church regularly or whatever combination of good works such a one feels necessary to be right with God. But Jesus calls us to remember, to mull over in our minds, that if we are rightly following Jesus, we will also suffer persecution. Again, such persecution may take sometimes mild forms, but indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

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What we are taught here is that the gospel, if it is preached fully, if there is an explanation of all being vile sinners who need to repent and who need to call upon the name of the Lord for salvation; if there is a call to see one's life transformed and brought daily into conformity with Jesus Christ, that by and large, the masses of people will reject. But praise God, that while the masses reject such truths, God calls out worldlings here and there – He opens their ears to hear the Word of God and obey and they experience freedom from the bondage of doing things the world's way. I am grateful to God who has opened the way of the small gate and the narrow way to Jesus Christ. There will be some to whom you speak who will "keep" the word of Christ – therefore we must be speaking it boldly and confidently.

Remember that Jesus boldly and confidently spoke the Word of God and while the masses rejected Him, a glorious few were saved. And through that few, you, if you have come to Christ, have also come to hear and have now kept His word.

So then, let us "*know*" that the world hates Christ before it hates us...let us grow in our understanding of that so that we have compassion on a world lost without Christ. Then, let us "*remember*" that if they persecuted Christ, they will also persecute us. But we are to have no worries, for Christ did such things and endured to be gloriously united with the Father and now, in Christ, we also will endure and one day be gloriously united with the Godhead. Let us be faithful; let us proclaim the truth to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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