

“You Are Not of the World”

The Forty-Eight in a Series of Sermons on the Gospel of John

Texts: John 15:18-16:4a; Psalm 35:17-28

Why do non-Christians dislike Christianity and Christians so much? No doubt, we ask for and deserve much of the world’s scorn because some Christians do stupid things, and then feel good that the world “hates” them. Then, there are many Christians who profess one thing, but do another. Hypocrisy is ugly. Granted, there are bad examples of Christians and Christianity continually upon display—the media loves to point these out, and probably should. But I’m talking about the fundamental divide between how Christians view the world, the human condition, human nature, and the important things in life, with those who reject Jesus, his word (scripture) and his claims (to be the way, the truth, and the life). With but a few moments remaining to instruct his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus answers this latter question. Because the world hates him, the world will hate his followers. The disciples will soon discover what Jesus means in the hours ahead, and his warning is given to prepare them for what will surely be the worst three days they will ever experience. They have given up everything to follow Jesus, and soon he will be dead and they will be hated. Jesus’ hour has come, and everything is about to change. The disciples must be prepared to face the tumultuous days which lay ahead.

We now resume our series on the Gospel of John. When we left off before Advent (with Jesus’ discourse on the vine and its branches in John 15:1-17), Jesus and his disciples were celebrating the Passover in a rented upper room in Jerusalem. This was Jesus’ last night with his disciples, and he used their remaining moments together to give his final instructions to his closest followers. When the Passover meal was finished, Jesus told them his hour has come—meaning that his messianic mission has come to its conclusion. At this point, the disciples understood this statement to mean that Jesus’ final showdown with the religious leadership of Israel is at hand. In the days after Jesus’ triumphant entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, things have come to a head, but the disciples still had no idea as to the turn of events which would take place later that evening, and for which Jesus is preparing them.

Jesus has just delivered the shocking news that one of their own (Judas) would betray him, and that their leader (Peter) would soon desert Jesus in his hour of trial. Jesus also told his disciples that it was good that he depart from them because the Father would send them another “Helper,” the blessed Holy Spirit. The disciples, of course, want to know where Jesus was going so that they might follow him. Jesus has told them that where he is going, they cannot yet come. Jesus will have much more to say about the “Helper” as the discourse draws to a close, as we will see in the weeks to come.

As recounted in the synoptic gospels, throughout the final phases of his messianic mission, Jesus spoke openly of his death and resurrection. According to John’s account, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead just days before Palm Sunday. Jesus also spoke candidly about how the disciples would soon find themselves in a new and unexpected situation. But Jesus’ words about these things only exposed the disciples’ collective misunderstanding of what he was telling them, and they still had many questions to ask of Jesus even though the time had come for the Lord to depart for the Garden of Gethsemane. It was there that Jesus would have his fateful encounter with the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas (the high priest), as these foes were led to Jesus by the traitor Judas in exchange for a mere thirty pieces of silver.

As we saw at the end of chapter 14, when Jesus got up to leave the Upper Room and go to Gethsemane,

the disciples did not want their time together to end. The discussion continued on for some time including the discourse of the vine and its branches in John 15, and including the material to the end of chapter 17. The disciples are beginning to understand that their time with Jesus is coming to an end, and there are many loose ends to tie up before Jesus departs.

As we take up our text, beginning with John 15:18, recall that Jesus has just told his disciples that he has chosen them to bear fruit—specifically that his disciples love one another (the new commandment). Love for our brethren has been a consistent theme of the Upper Room Discourse so far. But if the characteristic of God’s people is fruit-bearing, the characteristic of the world is hatred—hatred for Jesus, as well as for those whom he has chosen to bear fruit. According to Jesus (in verse 18), *“if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”*

Knowing that he is about to be arrested, tried, and then put to death, Jesus does not want the disciples to be caught off-guard by the events about to take place over the next few days, and again later when Jesus commissions them to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. The world hates Jesus—the world, in John’s writings, refers to the way non-Christians think and act, not the physical planet. Despite the fact that Jesus has been perfectly obedient to his Father’s will and has done nothing to offend anyone, the reason why the world hates Jesus was given back in John 7:7, when Jesus told the disciples that the world *“hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.”*

The offence which Jesus creates is not to be confused with being honest in uncomfortable situations; “Yes, dear, that dress makes you look a bit heavier,” or “that tie doesn’t really go with that shirt.” Rather, Jesus speaks the truth about the fundamental human condition—sin and guilt. It is Jesus who tells us that we love darkness rather than light because our deeds are evil. Once Jesus commissions his disciples to go and preach the gospel after Pentecost comes, and the Holy Spirit is poured out upon God’s people, those who know themselves to be sinners respond to the message of Christ crucified in great numbers, while the religious people (specifically the self-righteous among the leadership of Israel) hate being told that they are sinners in need of a Savior (Jesus). Jesus is preparing his disciples for what he knows is sure to come—the ire and scorn of the world.

But the warning that the world will hate Christ’s people should not be taken as solely bad news. To be hated as Jesus was hated, is not something which escapes the Father’s attention. In verse 19, Jesus tells the disciples, *“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.”* If the disciples had not been among those whom Jesus had chosen to bear fruit, they too would be among those offended by Jesus’ teaching about God’s demand for perfect obedience, about Israel’s role in redemptive history coming to an end with the dawn of the messianic age, and the news that God’s promised salvation was going to extend to the Gentiles, in addition to believing Jews. But Jesus has chosen these men to believe his promises to save them, and because he has chosen them, they will bear the fruit (love for one another in their hearts) about which Jesus has just been teaching. Which is better? To bear fruit the fruit of the Spirit, or be loved by the world?

To be chosen by Jesus to be one of his disciples is to be identified with Jesus and his kingdom. Since the world hates Jesus, the world will hate all those identified with him—that’s the disciples, and that is us. Some Christians may be hated so much they will be called to give their lives (as the countless martyrs across the ages testify). Others will be shunned, or treated like self-righteousness nitwits because we believe the things which Jesus has taught us in his word. Although there are times when Christians pick a fight with unbelievers in a foolish, tactless, or self-righteous way, let a Christian stand upon principle

and many in this culture will take personal offence, because ironically, they are too self-righteous to simply acknowledge that people can and do have differences of opinion about the most fundamental things in life. We can cite many examples of both sets of circumstances—Christians acting foolishly and Christians truly being persecuted. But let us not miss Jesus’ point to his disciples. If we are his disciples, we are going to be hated by the world. The reality is that the world will hate us, so we must never underestimate the temptation to take the easy way out and side with the world to avoid the scorn.

In verse 20, Jesus goes on to tell the disciples that the source of this hatred is the world’s reaction to Jesus and his teaching. *“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.”* Jesus is telling them plainly that as soon as he is dead, and no longer present to speak for the disciples in the presence of those who do not believe their message, they too will be persecuted just as he has been. Many who heard (i.e., “kept”) Jesus’ words believe him to be Israel’s Messiah and the Son of God. So too, many will believe in Jesus who are yet to hear the disciples preach the words that Jesus has spoken to them, which they will proclaim to the world. No doubt, Jesus’ disciples will be persecuted just as Jesus has been. But Jesus’ words will accomplish the purpose for which he has given them. People will hear Jesus’ words through the preaching of his disciples, and those who hear will keep that word by believing Jesus’ teaching. Jesus is not about to send the disciples on a futile and pointless mission.

In verse 21, Jesus clarifies that the opposition his disciples will inevitably face, stems from his person and work. If Jesus is who he says he is—Israel’s Messiah and the Son of God—then what he says is true. As he has just told them in John 14:6, Jesus is the only way to God, and people cannot be saved from the wrath to come by any means other than Jesus has revealed—through faith in him. Jesus’ message and its demands are so tied to Jesus’ name, that all someone need do is name the name of Jesus to experience the very hatred and scorn Jesus has been warning them about. *“But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.”*

Those who persecute Jesus and his followers do not know YHWH, who sent Jesus on his messianic mission. In the immediate context, Jesus is speaking of Caiaphas, as well as the Sanhedrin, despite all of their claims to the contrary. Those who do not know God, hate Jesus and his followers. Conversely, those who do not accept Jesus and those who proclaim his name, do not know God. Jesus is, in effect, telling his disciples (and us), that to name the name of Jesus will, in many instances, cause division. This is why whenever the gospel is preached, people react with hatred toward the things of God. The gospel opens up the ground under people’s feet, and forces those who hear the good news to jump either to the “I’m in side” or the “I’m out side.” The gospel makes people very uncomfortable, because it allows for no apathy, or middle ground.

Clearly, sin was in the world from the time of Adam, and the fall of the human race. Yet Jesus attributes the sinful response of the Israelites—their rejection of Jesus as Israel’s Messiah—to his own appearance among them. In verse 22, he declares, *“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.”* God has come to his people in the flesh, and then spoken to his people through the Messiah (Jesus). Israel hasn’t listened to Jesus because Jesus has not come to solve the problem they want solved; Roman military occupation.

Instead, Jesus has come to deal with humanity’s most fundamental problem—human sinfulness and the curse, which is death. Thinking they do not need such a Savior, the Jews are threatened by both Jesus’ presence and his teaching which exposes their unbelief, and then strips away the veneer of self-righteousness, exposing what lies within every human heart—sin. The people of Israel think of

themselves as God's chosen people who live in righteousness. This is why Israel's rejection of the promised one and covenant mediator places the nation under the final covenant curse—removal from the land of promise when the temple is destroyed and Jerusalem is sacked by the Romans in A.D. 70.

Jesus is crystal clear. Since he has been sent by YHWH, to reject Jesus, is to reject YHWH. In verse 23, Jesus tells the disciples, "*whoever hates me hates my Father also.*" The Jews claim that they are doing the will of YHWH in responding to Jesus' miracles and teaching by accusing him of being in league with the devil, as well as being a blasphemer. But in actuality, it is the members of the Sanhedrin who are opposing the will of God by refusing to believe that Jesus is the one whom God has sent, as confirmed by his many signs and wonders Jesus has performed—including raising Lazarus from the dead. As Jesus told them in John 8:21, "*I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.*"

This is what human sinfulness does to our reason and judgment. And this is yet another indication that Jesus is making a truth claim—*whoever hates him, hates God*. Strong words, but words our contemporaries need to hear. How many people do we know who mistakenly think of Jesus as some sort of Galilean boy scout who—in the words of John Warwick Montgomery—came to help little old ladies across the Sea of Galilee? No, Jesus claims to be sent by the Father, and that if you love God you must love Jesus. To reject Jesus, is to hate God. This is how Jesus himself puts the matter.

Jesus continues in verse 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.*" Without the work of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart, Jesus' miracles do not create faith. But the miracles he has performed do serve to condemn all those who witnessed them, and then still stubbornly refuse to accept his claim to be sent by YHWH. Both Jesus words and works condemn Israel. His words and works condemn us if we refuse to believe them. God has given his people every opportunity to repent and believe. The people of Israel, by and large, refuse. Jesus tells the disciples that for those who reject him, he has made their situation much worse. It would be better for such people that Jesus never came.

Yet, this too, was foretold by the prophets, as Jesus tells the disciples in verse 25. "*But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'*" Jesus cites from a passage which appears in both Psalm 35 (v. 19—part of our Old Testament lesson) and in Psalm 69 (v. 4). The Jews should have known their own scriptures well enough to understand that Jesus was that coming one foretold by Israel's prophets. The Jews also knew that their most famous king, David, was hated for no reason. And now the Davidic Messiah (Jesus being a descendent of David) is likewise hated by Israel even though he had given them no offense—except that he spoke the truth to them about who he is, about human guilt before God, and what he has come to do to save us. The irony is that this was written in "their law," i.e., in Israel's own scriptures. Jesus' tone is one sadness and frustration.

For the third time in the Upper Discourse, Jesus introduces the third person of the Holy Trinity, the blessed Holy Spirit (or Paraclete, the Comforter). "*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.*" The disciples are struggling throughout Jesus' entire messianic ministry with how there was only one true God (YHWH) which every Jew confessed in the *Shema*: "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one,*" in light of the fact that Jesus proclaimed that he was the Messiah, as well as the eternal word made flesh, the Son of God, who was, in some way, identified with YHWH. Did Jesus not tell Philip just moments before, "*whoever has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9). Still struggling to understand Jesus' relationship to YHWH, Jesus introduces them to the Holy Spirit. How can there be three divine

persons and yet only one God? The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is old news to us, but this was a new revelation to them.

This is the answer to the problem created by Jesus departing from them. It is the Helper who will come when Jesus departs. Jesus will send him from the Father, and he (the Holy Spirit) will bear witness to Jesus' person and work. As we read elsewhere in the New Testament, it is the Holy Spirit who regenerates people who otherwise are dead in sin, and it is the Holy Spirit who creates faith in the human heart through the means of the gospel. It is the Spirit who enables us to understand Jesus' words (in their fullness—their redemptive sense). It is the Spirit who enables us to see the miracles of Jesus as proof of his divine identity. The Spirit will enable Jesus' disciples to do the things which Jesus has instructed us to do. It is the Holy Spirit who will enable Jesus' disciples (and us) to withstand the hatred from the world which they are about to experience like never before. It is the Holy Spirit who will enable us to love one another, unlike the world which hates Jesus and those who follow him.

Now, I would be completely remiss if I did not point out that the interpretation of John 15:26 lies at the heart of one of the greatest disputes in the history of the church—the so-called “procession of the Spirit” (the *filioque* clause) in the Nicene Creed. Up until the eleventh century, the church affirmed in the Creed that the “Spirit proceeds from the Father.” When the Western Churches (i.e., the so called “Catholic Church”) added the words, “the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*,” the long simmering rift between the Greek-speaking Eastern churches and the Latin speaking Western churches became a full-fledged split (schism) between the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Church which exists down to the present day. Although a good case can be made that the Western church folk were rather cavalier in adding the phrase to the Creed without an ecumenical council, it is very clear that John teaches that Jesus will send the Spirit from the Father, which clearly supports the Western or “Catholic” addition.

This doesn't seem like much to us, but this gets to the very heart of Trinitarian theology and the relationship of the divine essence to the divine persons of the Son and Holy Spirit, as well as the role of the Son in sending the Spirit. John Calvin is no doubt correct in reminding us that the Scriptures speak of the Spirit of the Father, and the Spirit of Christ. This supports the Western view of the procession. If you are interested, Mike Horton has a great discussion of this in his systematic theology, *The Christian Faith*.¹ The bottom line for us is that John ties the work of the Spirit directly to the person of Christ who “sends him.” Jesus himself tells us that “*when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, he then adds “he [the Holy Spirit] will bear witness about me.” Biblically speaking, the Western Church is correct—the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.*

Since the tense of this last clause is future, “*he will bear witness*,” Jesus is clearly indicating that the end of his mission is near—in fact, just hours away. Jesus will depart from the disciples—his death, resurrection, and ascension—and then the Holy Spirit will come and bear witness through the disciples' preaching that Jesus is Israel's Messiah, the Son of God, and the only Savior of humanity. It is the Holy Spirit who will do what no disciple of Jesus can—change the human heart. In verse 27, Jesus adds, “*and you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.*” When Jesus departs (dies on the cross, is raised from the dead, and then ascends into heaven), the Holy Spirit will come (at Pentecost), and it is through the work of the Holy Spirit that the disciples (specifically those with Jesus from the beginning), will be the first witnesses to Israel and then to the ends of the earth, that Jesus is the

¹ Michael. S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 303-306.

Christ, the Son of God, and the only Savior of sinners. These men have been with Jesus from the first days of his mission (back in Galilee). They will be the apostles and pillars of the early church, and the Holy Spirit will breathe forth through them (or through others within their circles) the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

In verse 1, of chapter 16, Jesus tells the disciples why he has repeatedly told them about the ministry of the Helper, as well as the fact that they are about to be hated as never before. *“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.”* Jesus pulls no punches. Difficult days will come—in fact, the most difficult day of the disciples’ collective lives would come the next morning, when Jesus stands trial before Pilate and is then crucified. Not only will the disciples face this temptation to deny Jesus, but so will Christians throughout the ages, upon discovering that the world around them will hate us because of our allegiance to Jesus Christ. The Reformed do not believe that true Christians can fall away and be lost. But there are many in our midst for a time, who can and do fall away. In his first epistle, John warns us of those *who “went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”*

Jesus’ warning is real and not to be taken lightly. Peter, for one, fell away almost immediately after boasting he was willing to die for Jesus. By God’s grace, he came back, and eventually was put to death in Rome by Nero. But if Peter went weak in the knees when threatened with the same fate Jesus suffered, so too, we must be on guard for such things to continue to happen until the Lord returns.

Although their application extends to us, in context, these words from Jesus apply directly to the disciples, when he tells them in verse 2, *“they will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.”* If the disciples think that being in Jesus’ inner circle will gain them some sort of worldly benefit or status in the future, they need to get such thinking out of their minds this very moment.

The Jewish religious establishment will not think highly of, nor treat kindly, the followers of Jesus in the days to come. In fact, as the opening chapters of the Book of Acts indicate, the disciples will indeed be arrested for preaching the gospel which Jesus gave them to preach. Ten of the original disciples will die as martyrs, and John, the author of this gospel, who was arrested by the Romans and imprisoned for a time on the island of Patmos, is the only one of the twelve to live to old age and die of natural causes. Everything of which Jesus now warns them, comes to pass in the pages of the New Testament and in the history of the apostolic church. And yet, the gospel still goes to the ends of the earth and thousands upon thousands are soon converted. This is why Jesus said it was good that he go away and the Helper comes. For only the Holy Spirit can do the work of giving life to people who are spiritually dead.

Again, the reason why these things will happen is given to the disciples by Jesus in verse 3. *“And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.”* The great irony regarding Israel is that those who say they must put Jesus to death, do so under the guise of defending Israelite religion from the man they regard as an agent of the devil. And yet, because of their sin, their hardness of heart, and their out and out unbelief and self-righteousness, when the Messiah finally appears in their midst they think him a heretic and an enemy of the state. This is one of the greatest tragedies in human history and is the key plot turn in the story of redemption. To make sure that they are listening and paying attention, Jesus tells them in verse 4, *“but I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.”* No doubt, when the fog of shock and grief begins to lift with reports of Jesus resurrection, these words must have been ringing in their heads.

What then, do we say by way of application? Jesus has warned us that if we follow him, the world will hate us. Because we see the world around us through the eyes of faith, we have a fundamentally different take on things than non-Christians. Reformed theologians speak of this as the “antithesis.” We see a bloody cross and an empty tomb as historical events which save us from our sins. Non-Christians don’t care at all about history—all they want is some present experience or a moment of pleasure. We see sacrificial love for each other (the new commandment) and a life of gratitude as the foundation of church life. Many non-Christians see the church as a place to send your kids for moral instruction, or to learn practical wisdom for life (like success in business, relationships, or finance). Public opinion polls show that many non-Christians see church as a useless waste of time and the people who go there as those who think they are better than everybody else.

Make no mistake about it, if you trust in Jesus, the world will hate you—not always in obvious ways, but they will hate you. There is a price to pay for following Jesus—the scorn of those who do not believe. This is why Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms, that if you trust in him, “*you are not of this world.*” And he warns us, that the temptation will always be great to fall away to avoid the scorn. But he has given us the Helper (the blessed Holy Spirit) who unites us to Jesus and ensures that Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age. We will learn more about this comforter in the weeks to come. Amen.