

October 7, 2012

# *Living Out The Gospel In Real Life*

## *You Will Be Hated For My Name's Sake*

John 15:18 – 27

John fifteen is all about fruit-bearing. Jesus lays out for His followers what authentic faith looks like – and what He says is that it looks like a vineyard. He is the vine, we are the branches, and the Father is the faithful vine dresser who cuts off the dead branches and prunes the living ones. His point is that genuine followers of Christ are connected to Him in a way that mere fans of Jesus are not. If you are a true follower of Jesus then you have a vital branch and vine connection. That is, you are connected to Christ in a way that allows the life of Christ to flow in you and through you, and produce fruit. There are lots of people who say they are followers, but they are really just fans. Real followers produce real fruit because they are abiding in the vine.

And as we saw last week, abiding in Jesus, and letting Him abide in us – having that organic connection – means that we are letting His voice rule in our lives. To say that He is abiding in us *is* to say His words abide in us. Letting His words abide in us means that we welcome Him into our lives and make room for Him to live and speak – not as some sort of guest – but the resident within whose opinions on everything matter more to us than anyone else's, especially our own. And the fruit of that mutual abiding is love and obedience. The evidence of genuine discipleship is that we are growing in our love for God and our love for one another; and we are doing what He says. **'If you love Me' Jesus says, 'then you will obey Me.'** And then He says in verse 17: *'This I command you, that you love one another.'*

And it is in this context that Jesus begins to talk about something that seems, at first glance, unrelated to fruit-bearing. But when we examine the next few verses, we begin to see that what follows the first seventeen verses is really the effect of abiding in the vine. First of all He tells them that there will be **hostile conflict** – they will be hated. He says **'if'** but it is not if in the sense that that it might or might not happen. It is **'if'** in the sense that **if** you are a follower and not a fan, the world **will** hate you. And Jesus says that hatred is because of **radical change** – there is something so radically different about Christians that it will inspire hostility in the world. And in light of that radical change, Jesus gives them a **paramount charge** to bear witness to that change. And we need to understand that this is true of any genuine follower of Christ – all those who profess His name. This is not just the case for the elite Christians – this is true of anyone who claims to be a Christian. You will be hated by the world because you're different – and you are called to witness to the same hostile world the reason for the change.

There will be **hostile conflict** – you will be hated, Jesus says: ***"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. John 15:18*** In other words, ***"When you feel the hostility of the world directed at you – take heart – you're in good company because they hated Me first."*** A former Middle East correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, Yasmine El Rashidi, recounted what she saw, the day Egyptian police opened fire on Coptic Christian protestors last year about this time. She said, 'An announcer for State TV had on air called for Egyptians to go down and "defend the soldiers who protected the Egyptian revolution" against "armed Copts" who had opened fire and were killing soldiers ... Rough-looking men were arriving in groups ... They held bludgeons, wooden planks, knives, and even swords, and walked boldly into the chaos of burning cars, flying bullets, and glass. ***"We'll kill any Christian we get our hands on,"*** one of them shouted ... Nearby, a young girl was harassed, and a mob assaulted a young Coptic couple, beating them and ripping their clothes. One of the perpetrators emerged from the gang with blood on his hands. ***"Christian blood!"*** he boasted ..'

If you are a student of the Bible this doesn't come as a shock. If have been a follower of Jesus Christ for any length of time, you know this – or you should know this. Jesus was always warning His followers that the world would be hostile to them: ***"You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved."*** **Matthew 10:22** And again in chapter 24: ***"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name."*** **Matthew 24:9** Luke records the same thing ***"...and you will be hated by all because of My name."*** **Luke 21:17** In his letter, John reminds his readers of these words: ***Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. 1 John 3:13*** And Paul tells Timothy that hostility and persecution is part of the job description: ***"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."*** **2 Timothy 3:12** If you live a Christian life consistently, if you live for Christ flat-out, if you are really a follower and not a fan – it is inevitable that you will arouse hatred and outright hostility in the world around you.

*"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you."* What is it about Christians that inspires such hostility? Jesus uses some strong language – **hate**. The Greek word means to **pursue with hatred, to detest; to be hated**. The world doesn't just despise us from a distance – it pursues us with a vengeance. Why? Why the hostility? Jesus exposes the first part of the problem here in verse 19 – **they don't own us: *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.* John 15:19** First of all, when John uses the term '**world**' here, he is referring not to specific individuals, but to an evil, God-hating, Christ-persecuting world view that is alienated from God, and therefore hostile to the cause of Christ and anyone associated with Him. And Jesus says if you were of the world they would love you because they love their own – but they don't own you, they don't recognize you as one of them; consequently they hate you.

The world hates Christians because they don't own them. They can't control them. They are always doing things that run counter to the current-politically correct philosophy. Many of you may remember **C. Everett Koop**, an evangelical Christian who became the Surgeon General under Ronald Reagan in the 80's. And if you know anything about Koop, you know that because he was a Christian, the word of God was his guide and all his planning and policy decisions had that as a backdrop. In the beginning, the conservative right hailed him as their champion because of his stance on abortion. He was vigorously pro-life. But because of his stance, the liberal left did everything they could to block his appointment for a year. The New York Times ran an article calling him 'Dr. Unqualified', even though he was the leading pediatric surgeon in the country at the time. But half-way through his eight-year term, compelled by the same Christian values of compassion and love for his neighbor, he tackled the AID's issue that was beginning to explode. He felt the administration was covering it up and not developing plans and policies to deal with it. And as a result, everybody on the right wanted to string him up and everybody on the left said, 'Now there's a real Surgeon General'.

Near the end of his term, Koop was aspiring to other possible political appointments under the incoming administration, when someone sat him down and said, 'You can forget about any more appointments – you're too independent'. They couldn't own him. They couldn't control him. The world hates Christians because they will never put the appointment ahead of Christ. They won't put the company first. Christians won't put their job first or their race first or their family first or their culture first. One of the very first things Jesus says to potential followers is that He comes first: *If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.* Luke 14:26

One of the reasons Christians were fed to the lions in the first few centuries is because of this attitude. Once a year in the Roman Empire, every inhabitant had to make a sacrifice to the genius of the Emperor. It wasn't about how smart they thought he was. The Romans believed that the genius was the general divine spark that resided in every being – and to worship the Emperor's genius was more like pledging your loyalty to the Empire. What happened was that you would burn some incense and declare that Caesar was Lord. Which is exactly what Christians could not do. And so they were thrown to the lions because they couldn't be trusted – the state couldn't count on them putting the Empire first.

But the world also hates Christians for another reason: **the word of God.** *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.* John 15:20 You see when Jesus spoke – He spoke with authority. All through the gospels we read that the people were constantly amazed at His teaching. Mark says, *They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.* Mark 1:22 In Jesus' day, after a man got up in the synagogue and taught, the elders would pass judgment on what he said after he sat down. And if they thought his teaching was true – they would respond by saying, 'Amen, Amen', or 'Truly, truly'. But Jesus would nearly always **begin**, never **end**, His teachings in the gospels with 'Amen, Amen' – 'Truly, Truly'.

This was really an astonishing claim by Jesus. What He was saying was 'This is absolute truth – I don't need you to pass judgment on this because I am Truth – I take away your right to judge whether or not what I say is truth. As the Son of God, what I have to say is truth that is outside you and it will search you out and judge your heart – and you must listen to it, you must submit to it – it is absolute truth'. And the world hates that. The world is committed to the idea that there is no absolute truth – particularly when it comes to faith and moral issues. We as a people are obsessed with the notion that there is no such thing as Truth that is outside the world that can judge our experience. The world is committed to the proposition that feelings are more important than facts. 'If I feel this is right – then it is right – for me'. The world utterly rejects the notion that there is universal Truth that is true for everyone and will judge whether or not their feelings are true. If you come along and tell them that according to God's word, what they are doing is wrong, then you open yourself to hostile charges of being a judgmental bigot.

The problem is that the word of God shines a light on us and exposes our sinful hearts and nobody willingly runs to the light. The light hurts, **the truth hurts**, and as Jack Nicholson said to Tom Cruise in *A Few Good Men* – **'You can't handle the truth!'** Jesus told His disciples: ***If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.*** John 15:22 Deep down people know the ring of Truth. Truth has an authority and authenticity to it that can only be suppressed, but ultimately never truly denied. The angriest crowd of people I have ever seen was a few years ago when Focus on the Family held a rally at Safeco Field honoring marriage. Outside the stadium, lining the street opposite the stadium was a huge crowd representing the gay community of Washington. As my wife and I and our girls walked into the stadium we were personally, verbally attacked with the most hateful and vicious rhetoric I had ever heard from fellow human beings. What were we doing? Simply joining with thousands of other people to celebrate God's plan of marriage. We weren't holding an anti-gay rally – we didn't have signs that blasted people for being gay – we weren't shaking our fingers in their faces telling them how wrong they were. But just the fact that we were holding up God's word on marriage – that was blinding searchlight that exposed their hearts and they couldn't handle it.

And because Christians proclaim a Truth that comes from God – a truth from outside the world, above the world, that can judge the world, we will always find ourselves on the wrong end of things. The world will always be hostile to that. Look around the world. Communist and socialist governments routinely persecute the Christian church because in those countries Christianity is seen as conservative and reactionary, the truth it proclaims threatens the autonomy of the state. But in despotic, right-wing governments, the church is persecuted because it holds a truth that is seen as liberating and subversive, threatening the autonomy of the ruling class. But in countries like the U.S. where individual, personal freedom – the autonomy of the individual is the divine rule, the church will still be persecuted. Because the church has the audacity to say that there is a truth that is outside of us that is our ultimate judge. We are not allowed to operate on the basis of our personal needs, what we think will bring us happiness and fulfillment – we can't even just operate on the basis of serving others; but rather we are supposed to live for the glory of God and serve Him. Christians proclaim that there is only one way to know God and that is through His Son, Jesus Christ – and what He calls good we call good and what He calls sin, we call sin – and that is unacceptable to the world.

Nowhere are the battle lines more sharply drawn than in the present debate over same-sex marriage. The issue in this debate is not about equality. It is not about denying homosexuals the right to commit to each other. It is not about tolerance or intolerance, or being born a certain way. It's not about race or civil rights or even about religion. And for those who support gay marriage, it is not even about marriage. "How do we know? Because in countries with same-sex marriage 96 percent don't get married even when they have the opportunity. What the debate ultimately is about is validation and normalization. Greg Koukl, founder and president of Stand To Reason ministry says ***Same sex marriage is not about civil rights. It is about validation and social respect.*** What the debate is really about is finding a way for people to keep feeling fine in their sin.

But the gospel won't do that. Jesus didn't do that. Jesus won't leave us feeling fine in our sin. What Jesus does, what the gospel does is **radically change us**. Yes, the reason the world hates us is because they don't own us; yes they hate us because we hold up the searchlight of God's word and expose the deeds of darkness; but they really hate us because we've changed, and changed radically. We have embraced the gospel and surrendered our lives to the rule of Christ, and He has changed the very constitution of our being. We don't look like the world. We don't have the same priorities. We are not motivated by the same things. We don't have the same values and morals and ethics. Something's happened. The gospel comes in to make sinners into saints – and if you know anything about saints – the reason many are remembered as saints is because the world killed them.

And Jesus tells His disciples: ***But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.*** John 15:21 They hate us because they don't really know God. It is often the same people who say they know God that are the most hostile to real followers. He goes on to say: ***He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'They hated Me without a cause'.*** John 15:23-25 Jesus is talking about the Jewish religious leaders here. They said they knew God, but they proved they didn't know Him because they wanted to kill His Son. If you can't stand Jesus – it proves you don't really know God. The world of Jesus' day hated Him, and finally put Him to death. They hated Him because they didn't own Him. They hated Him because His words exposed their sin and His deeds exposed their selfishness. They hated Him because He was radically different. And the same thing happens to those who are radically changed by the gospel.

But Jesus doesn't radically change us to leave us to deal with a hostile, hating world on our own. He gives us the Helper – the Spirit of Truth. *When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me* John 15:26 And He makes it clear right away, that the Spirit of Truth comes in order to for us to do in the world, the very same thing He does in us – testify to Jesus. He gives His disciples, and us the **paramount charge** of the gospel: *and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.* John 15:27 You see, Jesus doesn't keep us protected from this hating world – He deliberately sends us out into the world with the message of the gospel a Jesus-hating, Christian-persecuting world desperately needs, but instinctively hates. He told the disciples that they were to be healing salt in the world. But if you put salt on a wound, it also stings as it heals. And the gospel stings. It is good news, but it stings. And sometimes people react badly to the sting.

There was a preacher on his way to church who found a little animal running around in a panic because its head was stuck in a cocoa can trying to get at the sweet stuff at the bottom. And the preacher thought, "Isn't that a great illustration of people in the world getting themselves into a predicament trying to satisfy their lusts'. But he was also a man of compassion and went over to try and get that little animal unstuck and discovered it was a skunk. And he suddenly realized he had a very difficult decision to make. It was very probable that the skunk would not think it was being helped by this pastor. In fact, it was more probable the skunk would let loose all over him. Jesus was telling the disciples that He was sending them out to testify about Him to people who would hate them. Matthew records that Jesus told His disciples: *I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as wise as snakes and as innocent as doves.* Matthew 10:16

And what chance would you give a sheep surrounded by wolves? What chance would you give that pastor getting out of that situation still smelling good? But we are not alone. It is as if Jesus is saying, 'When I stooped down in love you deserted Me. When I stooped down in love I got nailed and there was nobody with Me. But when you stoop down in love and tell this world about Me, you'll get nailed too. But the difference is, when I got nailed you weren't there, but when you get nailed, I'll be there. My Spirit of glory will rest on you and I'll stand by you – testify of Me! Reach down and remove the can – don't be foolish, try and stay downwind – but reach down anyway. Share the good news. Shine the light of the gospel in the darkness.' But know for certain that **the proclamation of the gospel always brings opposition to the gospel.**

When Stephen stood before the Council and proclaimed the Gospel, no doubt he felt very much the sheep among wolves. But he stood anyway. And what he said so angered his listeners that the Scriptures record that *'...they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him'*. Acts 7:54 They were so mad by what he said that they ground their teeth together. That must have looked a little like a pack of wolves circling their prey and baring their teeth. But it is almost as though Stephen didn't even notice them. *"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."* Acts 7:55-56 And that was entirely too much for these guys: *At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.* Acts 7:57-58

But guess what? Stephen's proclamation of the gospel to a hostile world and his death at the hands of angry men only served to begin the spread of the gospel into Judea and Samaria and to the far corners of the earth. If we are going to truly follow Jesus, our lives will be marked not only by a radical change, but by hostile conflict. The world Jesus sends us out into is not His friend and is not our friend. In fact, John later tells us in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter that friendship with the world is hostility with God. If you want a friendly world, don't follow Jesus. In fact, if there is little hostility from the world in your life – maybe it is because there really hasn't been any radical change in your life.

That night in the upper room where this discourse takes place, Jesus took some bread and some wine and told His disciples – 'This bread is My body that will be broken for you – and this wine is My blood that will be poured out for you.' In other words the cost of salvation is high – and because a slave is not above his master, Jesus was also saying the cost of following Him is high. **His** suffering and death at the hands of a hostile world, paid for our sins, removed the wrath of God from us and brought us joy – **our** suffering and death at the hands of a hostile world serves to point others to Christ where their sins can be forgiven, where they can be reconciled to God, and where their joy can be made full. As we take communion this morning – examine yourself – ask yourself – 'Am I willing to be hated for the sake of His name? Am I really a follower, or just a fan?' Peter, who was in the room that night, later wrote: *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.* 1 Peter 2:21 Will you follow Him to the cross?

*Our gracious God and Father,*

*We thank You from the depths of our being for Your wondrous grace and love in sending Your Son to bear our sins in His body on the cross. May the cross ever be to us the ground of all our comfort, the motivation of all our duties, the sum of all Your gospel promises and the strength of our love and thankfulness. Christ was torn that we might be made whole – Your wrath rested on Him that we might be justified – He was pierced that we might be forgiven – He was scourged that we might be healed. May Your cross O Lord be our boast and glory and may we take up our cross with joy. Grant us the boldness and grace of Stephen to proclaim the good news of the gospel to a hostile world, bearing Your reproach, so that many will be brought to joy in God. When we are hated by the world, let us not forget that the world hated You first. When we are despised and rejected, help us remember that You were despised and rejected, but still in love offered Yourself as a ransom for many. And let us delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people we pray in the precious, life-giving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*