

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus Christ

The Disciples and the World

John 15.17 - 16.4

4.14.19

"This I command you, that you love one another.

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. ²¹ "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. ²² "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ "He who hates Me hates My Father also. ²⁴ "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. ²⁵ "But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'*

²⁶ *"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, ²⁷ and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.*

John 16.1 "These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. ² "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. ³ "These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. ⁴ "But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.

We've been looking at the Training of the Twelve – how Jesus Christ developed the twelve disciples and made them leaders who changed the world.

For the last few weeks we've retreated, a kind of series-within-a-series, as we've focused on St. John's unique inclusion of the Final Unit of their instruction just hours before the arrest of Jesus Christ. This farewell speech was a kind of finale of everything they'd learned AND it was all meant to prepare them for the terrible spectacle of the Crucifixion.

One way of looking at this final lesson in the course is that the Teacher was equipping them with three new orientations: how they would now relate to Him, to one another and to the opposition.

They would relate differently to the Teacher because He would no longer be physically present to them. They would relate to one another as brothers (“love one another as I have loved you”). And today, how to relate to outsiders, what Jesus called “the world.”

How are disciples of Jesus Christ supposed to think about and relate to the world? What is meant by that title, “the world” and why are Christians against being “worldLY”? How is that we often quote the words, “God so LOVED the world...” but we’re also wary (at best) and critical or even flatly against the world? Are we for the world or against the world?

Today, Jesus Christ, His Disciples and the World:

- 1) A Question of Love and Hate
- 2) An Answer of Truth and Grace
- 3) A Walk of Pessimistic Optimism

Let me start by reminding us that while we’re super-privileged to be WITH the Twelve, these words were written to THEM and NOT directly to us.

When you analyze this passage, you naturally look for themes in the form of repeated words and ideas and in this passage it’s pretty easy. Up to now, the speech has focused a lot on love (love one another) but suddenly there’s a dark reversal and the word “hate” comes up – seven times in a row.

And the doer of this hating is the world, “If the world hates you...” and the sense is “when the world hates you...” as if it’s utterly certain. And then the hating world is mentioned about 30 times (the pronouns: “it, they, them, their” referring to “the world”).

So, it’s NOT so much that Christians are to hate the world but that the world hates Christians. Later, John will write, “Do not love the world...” (1 John 2.15) but the clear emphasis here is that the world will hate Christians. And the rationale for that assertion is (#1) “the world hated ME”, says Jesus, “and YOU (disciples) belong to Me, so the world will hate YOU.”

(#2) “You are not OF the world because I chose you OUT of the world...” i.e. “I’ve separated you from your original grouping and attached you to ME.”

(#3) The world is now EXPOSED – “I came to them with My words and with WORKS that no one else has ever performed in the history of the world – they saw the miracles; they heard the words...and they said, “Meh!” So they tipped their hand: it’s a blatantly WILLFUL ignorance. They DON’T WANT to know My Father or Me”, says Jesus (24).

So what emerges here is a question of love and hate: believers in Jesus are supposed to follow God in loving one another...and in loving the world (“God so loved the world...”) and we should

love our Father's world too BUT WE'RE ALSO TOLD that the world hates us and (as John later writes), "don't love the world" ... So, what's going on here?

Well, it's a kind of love-hate relationship. We love the new family into which we've been adopted NOT by our choice...this new family of fellow disciples of Jesus Christ. And we love the world that Jesus Christ came to save...but the world hates us and WE TOO ARE WARNED NOT TO LOVE THE WORLD.

There are apparently different senses of the word, "WORLD". Often Jesus Christ meant the whole creation and everyone IN IT. Other times He meant the way of thinking, the assumptions, the basic operating-system of the world, the basic principles on which the world functions – especially the idea of "this-for-that" – I do for YOU and then YOU owe me.

John uses the word "kosmos" or world some 80 times in His writings. Sometimes he refers to creation, sometimes to people and sometimes to this system of transaction where we get NOT by depending on God's gifts but by depending on ourselves and fool ourselves into thinking we're independent of God.

Today's passage...and its 30 references to the "the world" (including the pronouns) this passage is about the world's way of thinking – its anti-God and anti-Christ, self-sufficient, self-delusion. The world, in this sense, hates God, hates the One He sent and hates YOU if you are taken away from the world and are given, by God's choice, to Jesus Christ.

A few years ago I started reading the Psalms more deliberately. I try to read five Psalms per day (I'll happily share my plan with you) but one surprise in this practice is how frequently OPPOSITION comes up in the Psalms. Almost every Psalm has some focus on opposition, enemies, evil, hostility, attack... hatred.

And I'm thinking, "Wow! Ancient kings like David had a rough time!" But the New Testament picks up the theme: "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Eph 6.12)

And Jesus Christ Himself in this very chapter (16.11) will say, "because the ruler of this world has been judged..." as if this "way of the world" has an author, a power, a promoter... a ruler.

So, how do we live in this weird tension between love and hate? Well, the answer is TRUTH and GRACE.

We are not the Twelve Apostles, but if you are a believer in Jesus Christ you ARE a disciple.

You are living in a different time and place. We have had 20 centuries of Christian influence.

Most of us (unless you're from a Jewish background...and some of us are!) most though are not concerned with being shunned and cast out of a synagogue (as the original disciples were) but we DO live in “the world”.

And the same way Jesus Christ fortified them, He also offers to us. We too should expect this opposition... in fact more than we normally expect (read the Psalms). We are NOT above our Teacher and if He was hated, so we too. Just to KNOW that IS a help.

And if you are believing in Jesus Christ it's because He chose you. In the wonderful mystery of amazing grace, God liberated you from the gravitational pull of THIS world and opened your eyes to believe. “I chose you out of the world,” says Jesus Christ to YOU!

And this angers the world – the world will interpret this as self-righteousness. You will protest: “NO! It's NOT like that! I'm a bigger sinner than you are but God arrested me and opened my eyes!” And people will say, “Nope! You think you're better than I am!”

And we should answer with truth and grace: “No! I am in NO WAY better than you... It was God giving me a new standing, a new identity, a new family – He gave ME what Jesus Christ deserved – that's grace!”

And God may graciously use your words to open their eyes... so they enter this new family OR they may say, “Nope! There's no such thing as a free lunch! You think you're better than I am!”

And you may hold out the miracles that Jesus Christ performed and the words He spoke that no one else ever performed or said...and they may...look into these unique claims and may even look at the one great miracle – the Resurrection – and they may conclude (like the centurion who stood by the Cross): “Truly this Man was the Son of God...” OR they may say to you, “If I could actually SEE a miracle – THEN, I would believe...” and you'll remember: sadly, that's NOT how it works – not then, NOT NOW!

You may know that Jesus Christ (from these very chapters) is putting us in this wonderful but, humanly-speaking, impossible tension of being IN the world but not OF the world. (I heard someone say recently, “We want the boat in the water but not water in the boat.” Good illustration but ...easier said than done!)

How do you live in this whole system, like the very air we breathe is permeated with this karma system where everyone around us (and we too!) are constantly looking to (as one author recently put it) looking to career, parenting, technology, food, politics, romance, fitness to GIVE THEM THIS SENSE OF ENOUGHNESS – the messages are spraying at us from every direction (like in a drive-thru carwash!) – “only if you're the perfect parent will you really be satisfied...be enough...only if you have the perfect vacation...the perfect abs...the optimal career, the latest devices – ONLY WHEN YOU DO YOUR BEST WILL YOU ACHIEVE INNER PEACE...”

We're not floating in this – it's also raining down on us like a hurricane...and it was for those original disciples... And the only thing that saved them and the only thing that will save us is the Truth and Grace of God – salvation *extra nos* (from outside ourselves) Jesus Christ “enthroned upon the awful Tree” and the Spirit of God to make us alive and give us eyes to see. “In this world you will face opposition,” says Jesus, “but I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD.” (16.33)

Now, here's a few helps for living IN the world of karma and transactional-well-being – IN the world but not OF the world: Be on your toes

Be on your knees

Keep your head in the clouds and

Keep your feet on the ground

Paul will say, “Be careful how you walk, not as unwise but as wise” (Eph 5.15) (i.e. be on your toes). As it helped the disciples to know what was coming, so with us – it's very instructive to know that we are in a hurricane of karma and the world, the flesh and the devil are actively opposing the Truth and Grace of the Gospel. Whenever we look to these other things to give us this “enoughness” (even the good things like family, success, accolades from colleagues, pastimes...) whenever we look with religious devotion to any of these things (whenever we turn good things into ultimate things) – we are NOT wise, but unwise – we are back in the world and the love, joy, peace, patience that come from OUTSIDE OURSELVES by God's Spirit – these begin to dry up.

In fact, be on your toes to see that when these graces (the Fruit/Evidence of the Spirit) are absent, it's likely that you're not believing the Good News that it doesn't depend on your kid's success or your abs – it all depends on Jesus overcoming the world and HE HAS!

Stay on your toes to know that the real issue is “WHAT are you trusting?” at any given moment! Is it Christ and Him crucified or is it something YOU or someone else can generate... Grace or Karma?

Second, be on your toes AND (#2) be on your knees: only the Helper can keep us IN the world but not OF the world. “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 bear witness of Me...” (15.26) Again, this is spoken to the Apostles (who were with Jesus Christ from the beginning) but it applies to us as well.

God, the Father, loves to give us the Spirit to help us (Luke 11.13 – “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”) So, learn how to get on your knees and simply ask for the Helper, the Spirit of Truth. Ask God, the Spirit, to keep you in GRACE/TRUTH.

And if you haven't begun to live this way – why not start now? Simply ask God, “Lord, I want to believe – please by Your Spirit give me faith to keep believing.”

Third, keep your head in the clouds – i.e. come to this little embassy of heaven, the church. It's an oasis in this wasteland called the world. It's a place where we love and encourage one another to live in the ONE TRUE ALTERNATIVE to self-dependence, to live by grace not by self, to find our enoughness in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

I know out there – it's waiting for us: the World! And it's telling us, “try harder...do more...you're almost as good as the next guy...keep pushing and eventually you'll measure up and find peace...” But here for a few minutes (and through the week in small groups) we hear the truth of grace: “IT IS FINISHED – I AM ENOUGH!”

Lastly, on your toes, on your knees, head in clouds and feet on the ground: we will face trouble. “In this world you will face tribulation...” even hatred. Often it's because we're acting insensitively and being a jerk (I'm speaking from experience!) but sometimes it's simply because we are living by grace, through faith. And that is promised... So keep your feet on the ground, be sure you're not just insisting on your rights (that's NOT what Jesus has in mind)... But sometimes we will just be hated by the world because we are living by grace... and in that moment hear Jesus Christ say, “Take heart, I have overcome the world!”