

GSM 24<sup>th</sup> February 2013

John 15:18-25

Disciples of Christ....Will be Hated

18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember what I told you: 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 Those who hate me hate my Father as well. 24 If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. 25 But this is to fulfil what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'

Good morning, today we're continuing our sermon series on what it means to be a disciple of Christ. So far, we've looked at how Disciples of Christ follow him, take up their cross, serve others, count the cost, give extravagantly, are fruitful and love one another. And if we do all of these things, we need to be prepared to encounter hostility as a result. These things don't go along with the world's philosophy; selflessness motivated by the one true God isn't accepted. Selfishness and pluralism is. And what happens when these two meet? Hatred is often the outcome. And increasingly, the world is advocating that everyone has their own right to believe what is right and wrong. So, the theme of today's sermon is that Disciples of Christ will be hated. Now, hate is a strong word; in essence, it's the opposite extreme to love. These two are polar opposites. And both are words that Jesus uses in his ministry to prepare us for following in his footsteps. In short, as Christians, we will be hated. I'll explain what that means later. What I want us to see today is that there is a response to the hatred - the response that Jesus has already shown us, the response of love. The gospel love that we bring to others may be met with hate, yet it is this same hate that is also overcome by the kind of love Jesus leads us towards through his teaching.

I'd like to start with a brief story to set the scene for today's sermon. It comes from a book some of you may have heard of or read before, called Jesus Freaks. It was compiled by an organisation called The Voice of the Martyrs, which is an organisation set up to support persecuted Christians around the world. This is volume one, telling select stories of persecuted Christians around the world, from Stephen the martyr as told in the book of Acts, right up to the present day.

Jesus Freaks p50 – girl refuses to spit on Bible.

Now, some of you may have found that quite shocking to hear. But, it is a true story and similar things are happening around the world. How do you think that you would respond in a situation like this? Could you do what this teenager did? We need to be prepared for this kind of persecution and hatred, even though it is unlikely that we will ever encounter it in this form. We need to be aware of it so that we can be ready for it, and also so that we can support our brothers and sisters around the world who don't live in the relatively safe society that we do.

So this week, there's a slight contrast compared to last week when Vincent talked about loving one another. But there will also be similarities to last week when we look at the loving response we should return to those who hate us. Now, being hated goes along similarly with taking up your cross and counting the cost, that is, that as disciples of Christ, we will be persecuted. It started with Jesus being persecuted for the message he brought 2000 years ago, and it continues today. That story I just read was from the 1970s. In the past months, we've heard of churches being torched in Africa, oppression in North Korea and violence against Christians in the Middle East. That is hatred at its most explicit; when it is physical and tangible. This morning, however, I'm going to focus on the UK. Being hated in the UK is much more subtle and less apparent than elsewhere. So let's look at the passage for today and see what Jesus tells us about being hated for being his disciples.

Read passage - get someone to do this!

Here, in this passage, Jesus tells his disciples that they will be hated. He's not a salesman only telling us the benefits of discipleship, he's telling us the real consequences and effects of being one of his disciples. Now, you might say that there are a lot of 'ifs' in the passage - that's it's only a possibility that we will be hated. But we have the viewpoint of being able to look back in time and see what happened. Jesus was hated by the world, and he

was persecuted. The Pharisees hated his teaching so much that they devised a plan to have Jesus executed. Therefore we know that we will also suffer from being hated by the world. The conditional 'ifs' that Jesus talks of in this passage are definite. What is important, for us today, is to be able to identify when we are being persecuted and hated for being disciples of Christ, and how we should respond to that hatred.

Firstly, some context for this passage. At this point in the book of John, Jesus and his disciples are in Jerusalem, in the upper room, and Jesus is eating with his disciples for the final time before going to his death on the cross. This passage comes after probably one of the most well-known passages of Scripture - I am the vine, you are the branches, and greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. I think the 'one's' there might be a bit of politically correct gender neutralization! That aside, Jesus has been talking to his followers about remaining in him, and loving one another. And in doing these things, the world around them will respond in the way shown in today's passage - in a way of hate. So, today, we'll look at a sentence which summaries this passage and pick our way through it. The sentence has three parts - "The world will hate you and act on it, because you are not of this world, you have been chosen by Jesus". After that, we'll look at how to respond to the world's hatred.

So the first part of the sentence is: "The world will hate you and act on it" - very simple isn't it? If we look at v18, Jesus tells us to remember that the world first hated him. And why will the world hate us as disciples of Christ? Because of Jesus' name - look at v21: 'they will treat you this way because of my name'. And also because of Jesus' teachings - in v20 Jesus says that if people obeyed his teaching, they will obey that of the apostles also. And reversing that, if people reject Jesus' teaching, they will do the same to the apostles' teaching - they will reject it, and they will hate it. Because the world hates Jesus, those who follow him, and who teach what he taught, will also be hated. As we heard from the story earlier, this hatred can be very violent and extreme. We can look at what happened to Jesus on the cross, and also what happened to his disciples - many were imprisoned and beaten, executed, crucified and beheaded. But today, in the UK, we don't tend to experience the same kind of hatred. Some of you may have never openly experienced being hated for being a Christian.

So, in what way are we hated as Christians in today's world? I think, that we are still hated for the gospel message we bring, in the same way that Stephen was in the book of Acts. But instead of imprisonment and physical violence being the response to the gospel message, the response today is to be pushed out of society, to be scorned for appearing old-fashioned and irrelevant, and for anger to build up. Often, evangelical Christians are labelled as 'fundamentalist' and 'extremist'. When I told one someone in my lab about being a Christian, they asked what denomination, and when I told them 'evangelical', their immediate response was to screw up their face and make disapproving noises. Now, that wasn't just because they saw my face, it was because they dislike the idea of someone telling them that what they believe is wrong, and they dislike the idea of being judged, even though I haven't said that to them explicitly. One of the fundamental truths of being a Christian is accepting that we're sinful, and that we're condemned to hell without the saving act of Jesus dying on the cross in our place. To tell someone that sinful people are going to go to hell will likely be met with anger and indignation, despite it being true. Even people who call themselves Christians get angry with the idea of people being sent to hell. The most famous example probably being Rob Bell, an American pastor, who claims that God's love means that everybody goes to heaven, even those who reject God.

As a whole, the most recent example of the church being seen as old-fashioned is the issue of same-sex marriage. Many non-Christians in society have been offended that the Church of England has been seen as having a say in the issue when many see it as a secular issue. Another example is when allowing women bishops wasn't agreed upon in the General Synod last year, leading to claims of the church being sexist. The church is hated for not implementing the world's values. It's hard to see the UK as a Christian country anymore. As a result, in general, when we tell others that we're a Christian, one of the responses others have is to think of us as old-fashioned and belonging to a body of people who don't believe in gender equality. And that response, in its purest form, is hate. So I think it's a good idea to keep this in mind whenever we build relationships with believers and with non-believers. People may already have pre-formed opinions about our beliefs and their own beliefs, and we need to be prepared to both explain and show them what we truly believe and what the Biblical truths are. So, friends outwardly may not show any resentment to you as a Christian, but inwardly, they don't accept you as a Christian because they reject and hate the message you bring. To summarize, we are hated in UK society, but the physical hatred of us as Christians isn't as apparent as it is in other countries, like the Middle East, but it is still there, in the revulsion which meets the gospel message that we bring as disciples of Christ. Whenever we hear 'oh, it's all the same God whatever religion you are' or 'you can believe what you want and I'll believe what I want', that's a rejection of the gospel message and stems from the hatred of that message.

Now for the second part of the sentence: "You are not of this world" - let's look at v19 - 'if you belonged to this world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.' Again, this is fairly straight forward. We are not of this world, and as a result of being chosen out of the world, the world hates us. This raises a couple of questions - what does it mean not to belong to this world? And what does it mean that we have been chosen? Belonging to this world means becoming obsessed with this world and seeing your value in worldly terms. Belonging to the world means that in all you do, you're seeking to gain as much earthly wealth as possible, be that money, family, status, job; and also that you judge yourself by the world's standards. Success is measured, quantified and compared to that of others. Most things are done for the here and now, with some things done for the future (like a pension), but not for eternity. People want to be remembered for their legacy; that they might be remembered after they're gone. If you ask people why they are doing something, how often does the response focus around the word 'I' or 'me'? My supervisor occasionally asks me what I want to do after my PhD and tells me that I need to go to America if I want to be successful in academic research. And I'm non-committal about it because I don't know what God's got planned for the future. I'm happy to say that I'm content to trust in God's plan, but sometimes I imagine the future being very successful and earning big bucks. If we are a disciple of Christ, it means that we aren't motivated by that. Our self-value isn't based on worldly measurements. Wealth is stored in heaven, not on earth. In Matthew 6, Jesus tells his disciples this: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."* Our motivation is different also. We are told in Colossians 3 to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things. Our minds are to be focused on eternity with God, not on attaining the best personal gain now. That's what it means to belong to Christ and not to this world.

That brings us to the question of what it means to be chosen. We've looked at "The world will hate you and act on it, because you are not of this world," now to look at the final part of the sentence: "you have been chosen by Jesus". It's often heard in the Christian community - you are one of the chosen ones, you have been chosen, you are one of the elect. Back in the Old Testament, the Israelites were God's chosen people. Humanly speaking, they were the only nation God had chosen and he made covenants with Abraham, Moses and David to affirm this. When Jesus came down to earth, he fulfilled the covenants and made a new covenant. The people included in God's chosen nation now don't have to be Israelite. So what do people have to do to be chosen as one of God's people? Absolutely nothing! There's no possible way by which we can earn or gain our way into being chosen as one of God's people. The only way by which we are qualified to become one of God's chosen people is by Jesus dying on the cross for us. On our own, we are sinful beings, who can never match the sinless standard set for us to have a relationship with God. The only reason for us being one of God's people is because he came to us first, in his son, and chose us. If we look at this passage in John, in v19, we have been chosen 'out of the world'. The literal meaning of the word for 'choose' means to select or pick out of a group. If you imagine the FA cup draw, where there's two goldfish bowls filled with small balls, we have been chosen out of the world's bowl and put into the bowl of God's chosen people. There is that separation between us and the world. We have been set apart and made distinctive to the world. And how do we show that we're distinctive? We call on the name of Jesus and recognise him as our Lord and Saviour. We also act as disciples of Christ, as we've been looking at the past few weeks - we serve others, we give generously, we spread the gospel, are prepared to suffer and we love one another. And because we're in God's bowl, we will be hated for two reasons - we aren't in the world's bowl and because we're in a different bowl. We're not similar to the world and we're distinctive to the world. And we have to be in one bowl or the other. We can't be distinctive and belong to the world. And we can't be similar and not belong to the world. This idea may be hard to get your head around, but Jesus says in Matthew 12 'whoever is not with me is against me'. It's black and white, Jesus doesn't mince his words, and he explains that you're either in his bowl or you're not.

What's the response to the world's hatred then? We've seen the reasons behind why we're not accepted as part of this world, but do we return hatred with hatred? Vincent showed us last week that Jesus tells us to love one another, and that this means both Christians and non-believers. Therefore, we are to give love in return for hate. We can see this in 1 Corinthians 4:11-13 where Paul writes the following: *"To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment."* So, in this world, we are viewed as the scum and garbage. Yet, in Matthew 5:43-45 Jesus tells us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. Jesus tells us that we will have enemies in this life and that we need to love our enemies. We need to hold these two things in balance. If we focus on the fact that we have enemies, then we will prepare for the worst. We will see enemies everywhere and struggle to love and forgive them. If we focus on

needing to love and forgiving those who hate us, then we try to gloss over situations where there is real hatred being used against us. It stops us from challenging false teachings and allows the world to use us as a doormat. We need to hold these together with the help of the Holy Spirit working in us. This week, I read an article titled 'To Follow Christ Is to Love Them When They Hate You' written by Rev Kevin DeYoung, who is a senior pastor at United Reformed Church in Michigan, USA. He ends his article with the following: *"If you are going to be a faithful Christian in a fallen world you better be prepared for people to hate you, and you better be prepared to love them nonetheless. Even to the point of death."* So, "The world will hate you and act on it, because you are not of this world, you have been chosen by Jesus". Our response to those who hate us is to be prepared to love those who hate us, even to the point of death.

I'm going to pray to finish. Thank you Lord for your word, and for the way in which you prepare us for all kinds of trials through your teaching. I pray that you would give us the strength to endure anything that comes against us, and the grace to love and forgive those who come against us in hate, whatever form that may take. Amen.

[Jesus Freaks p96 – thundering legion - response to persecution.]

### Small Group Questions

1. How did the world show that it hated Jesus?
2. How does it show this today?
3. What does it mean that we don't belong to this world? What does it mean that we have been chosen out of the world?
4. What consequences might there be to being distinctive as disciples of Christ? (focus on UK if possible)
5. Has anyone experienced times of being hated because they are a Christian?
6. How can we respond to people who try to prevent us demonstrating our faith in public?
7. Are we prepared to love those who hate us?
8. What practical things can we do to help withstand hatred, and to be able to respond to it with love?