

John 15:18-25 Counting the Cost

Tim Anderson 14/10/18

When I was a kid,
'hate' was a word my mother told me not to use.
It's OK to dislike someone,
or to dislike something they have done to you.
But you mustn't say that you hate them.
Why not?
Because it's too strong a word.
Hatred is what starts wars.
Hatred is blind.
We talk about blind hatred.
A mind so poisoned by enmity
that it can't think clearly about the issue.

Today, hate is everywhere.
If someone disagrees with you on social media,
what is the label they are given?
They are a 'hater'.
It's somewhat devalued the currency of hatred.
What do you call the blind fury that starts wars now?
Hatred doesn't seem a strong enough word.

Jesus says,
"If the world hates you,
keep in mind that it hated me first."
When Jesus talks about hatred,
he's not talking about a little temper tantrum
because someone gave my post a thumbs down on instagram.
He's talking about the mindless fury
that would take an innocent man,

a man who had shown love to the outcast,
a man who had healed the sick,
and whip him till his back bled freely,
and push a thorn bush down on his head
so the prickles jammed into his scalp,
then nail him to a couple of planks of wood,
and hang him there till he died.
That's the hatred Jesus is talking about.
That's real hatred.

And Jesus says,
"If the world hates you,
keep in mind that it hated me first."
Jesus is not expressing any doubt here.
The construction is clear in Greek.
It means,
"If the world hates you and it will for certain,
keep in mind that it hated me first."

Now this has always proved a bit of a struggle for me.
You see, I don't experience the hatred of the world.
Certainly not when I was younger.
If I lived out my Christian faith,
I got approval from those around me.
My parents were happy.
Some of my grandparents would have preferred I be a bit more rebellious
and resisted the Christian indoctrination of my parents a bit harder,
but they never spoke against me or my choices.
My schools were happy that I was a Christian.
The only time at school my Christian faith came up against the school
was when the head of the music department
scheduled an extra rehearsal for a music performance

on a Sunday morning.

I told her I wouldn't be available

as I was going to church on Sunday morning.

She threatened me with a detention.

I told her I would go to church anyway.

And she never gave me the detention.

Which is not surprising.

How was she going to explain it

to my every Sunday church attending headmaster when I complained?

Well the world has changed since I was a boy.

And now some Christians do experience genuine inconvenience
as they try to live out their faith.

Particularly if you publicly express traditional Christian views
on contested social issues in the community,
you will run into a bit of flack.

But it does feel a bit much to say that the world hates us.

Is Jesus slightly exaggerating here?

Is this something like the camel going through the eye of the needle,
where Jesus paints a vivid word picture,
which if taken literally would be an exaggeration,
but it is meant to point you to an important truth?

No, not at all.

We just happen to live in a privileged place and at a privileged time.
The Christians who are being killed in South Sudan
know that the world hates them.

Same with Christians in Northern Nigeria and Syria.

Same with those who were fed to the lions in Ancient Rome,
and those who were sent to the Gulags in the Soviet Union.

The world will hate us.

And if it hasn't hated us yet in Australia,
the clock is ticking.

And the changes we've seen in the last decade
are just giving us forewarning that our days of ease are drawing to a close.

Why does the world hate us?

Jesus says in 15:19,

"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."

Why does the world hate us?

Because we don't belong.

Because we are different.

Because we are chosen by God and taken out of the world.

It's the logic of the primary school playground,
that if you don't belong,
you will be ostracised.

There's nothing wrong with having white hair.

I grew up with white hair.

And in my family no one teased me for it.

But at school,

it was unrelenting.

Started in about grade 2 and continued till the end of school.

Why did no one tease me in my family?

Because all my brothers and sisters had white hair too.

Why did they tease me at school?

Because I was different.

Now the world has got better at tolerating some sorts of difference.

But the sort of difference that is being a Christian,

it will always find that difficult to tolerate.

Why is that?

Because just living a faithful Christian life
puts a spotlight on the bad actions and bad attitudes of others.
You don't even have to say anything.
Suppose everyone at your workplace
likes to whinge about the boss when he's not looking.
And you won't be a part of it because you want to honour Jesus.
Do you think your coworkers are going to say,
"Well it's your choice whether you want to join in,
it's a free country."?
No they won't.
They will interpret your good attitude as judging their bad attitude.
You don't need to criticise their bad attitude.
Just absenting yourself will be enough.
They will start to treat you like you don't belong.
They might make comments
about how you are sucking up to the boss looking for a pay rise.
If you belonged to the world,
it would love you as its own.
But the moment your actions show that you don't belong,
then the world will start to cut you off.
And the end point of that is hatred.
e haven't seen hatred here yet,
but it will come.

Now if you have a tender conscience,
you might ask the question,
"If I'm not experiencing hatred,
does that mean that I'm not living that faithful Christian life?
Are my actions and attitudes not different enough from the world
to cause hatred?"
It's a very good question.
During the second world war,

there were two branches of the Lutheran Church in Germany:
the Confessing Church and the German Christian Church.
The Confessing Church with leaders such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer
spoke out about the evils of Nazism.

The German Christian Church did not.

No prizes for guessing which church was hated by the world.

If you were in the German Christian Church,
it would have been a very fair question to ask,

"If I'm not experiencing hatred,
does that mean I'm not living a faithful Christian life?"

The answer would have been yes at some level.

Even if at a personal level

you exhibited the fruit of the Spirit in your daily interactions with others,
if you gave your support to an institution that backed Hitler,
at some level you failed to live an authentic Christian life.

The point of the illustration is to say,
there is the temptation to fly under the radar in our Christian faith
and so avoid the hatred

that Jesus says will be the natural consequence of following him.

That's one reason I took the family in
to the March for the Babies yesterday.

There's a great temptation not to do or say things
that will offend some people.

It makes life easier.

But if it's right and it's important,

then we ought not to shy away from graciously voicing our opinion.

But there's another side to the question,

"If I'm not experiencing hatred,
does that mean that I'm not living that faithful Christian life?"

We live in a culture that is very shaped by the Christian gospel.

I'm reading Meredith Lake's "The Bible in Australia" at the moment.

It won the Australia Christian book of the year award this year.
It's encouraging reading about
how God's Word has had a shaping influence
across every level of Australian society for 230 years.
If we are not experiencing hatred right now,
it may be the echoes of that heritage
which still cause our culture to value a Christian presence.
It may be that it's not a failing of our discipleship at all.

Here's another question people often ask.
When they run into some hatred from the world,
People often ask,
"Have I stuffed up?
Am I getting some pushback
because I didn't express myself exactly right?"
Well of course it's possible that you might have stuffed up.
But at a fundamental level, it's not about you, it's about Jesus.
In 15:20-21, Jesus says,
"Remember what I told you:
'A servant is not greater than his master.'
If they persecuted me,
they will persecute you also.
If they obeyed my teaching,
they will obey yours also.
They will treat you this way because of my name,
for they do not know the one who sent me."
As in the earlier verse,
just because Jesus says 'if'
doesn't mean he thinks things are not cut and dried.
You could say,
If they persecuted me -
and they have -

they will persecute you also.
If they obeyed my teaching -
and they didn't,
they will obey yours also -
and they won't.

It's the most natural thing in the world
to think that you've stuffed up when you face hostility to your faith.

Jesus says,

"It's about me, it's not about you."

And that's very comforting.

Why is this person being hostile to me?

Well I'm not greater than Jesus.

They were hostile to him.

They will be hostile to me too.

You can face suffering far more easily

if your mind isn't telling you that it's all your fault.

Often it's not the suffering itself that hurts,

it's the thought that I've been stupid and brought this on myself.

Often it's just not true.

People are hostile to Jesus and they are taking it out on you.

So wear it as a badge of honour.

This is how the apostles responded in Acts 5.

They were flogged by the Sanhedrin

and told not to speak in the name of Jesus.

Acts 5:41 tell us,

"The apostles left the Sanhedrin,

rejoicing because they had been counted worthy

of suffering disgrace for the name."

Which name?

The name of Jesus.

Why does the world hate Jesus?

Jesus healed their sick.

Jesus loved the outcast.

Jesus drove out their demons.

Why did they hate him?

Verse 25 tells us,

"They hated me without reason."

Of course nothing happens without a reason.

Jesus means that they hated him

without any of the usual reasons why you might hate someone.

Usually people hate because someone has wronged them.

Jesus wronged no one.

There were none of the usual reasons for hating Jesus.

So why did they hate him?

Verse 22 tells us,

"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."

Which is not to say that people prior to the coming of Jesus were not guilty of sin.

They were.

We are.

Everyone is guilty of sin.

As the apostle Paul told the Romans,

"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

But there's one particular sin they would not be guilty of if Jesus had not come and spoken to them.

They would not be guilty of the sin of rejecting God's chosen Messiah.

They would not be guilty of rejecting the only path of salvation that God has prepared for his chosen children.

But now that Jesus has come and spoken to them,

he has taken away their excuse.

No one can say,
"I didn't know what God expect of me."
Jesus has told us what God expects of us.
This is what Jesus said in John 6:29.
"The work of God is this:
to believe in the one he has sent."
Jesus has taken away people's excuses for ignoring God.
Jesus has told us what we must do.
We must believe in him.
That is the only path of salvation.
Anything apart from that is hatred towards God.
And that is why they hated him.
He took away their excuse.
He did great miracles in plain sight.
And people chose to reject God's revelation of the truth.
And anyone who hates Jesus hates the Father as well.

Friends, we are without excuse.
This world is without excuse.
The revelation of God has been plainly displayed to us.
God has revealed himself in the person of his only Son.
But the world hates having its sin exposed.
The world hates being told that God has a claim on our lives.
It hates being told that he is our creator
and we owe him our lives in humble worship.
The world doesn't only hate the Lord Jesus.
It hates those who bring the message of the Lord Jesus.
We are not greater than our master.
They hated him.
They will hate us too.
If you haven't experienced that yet,
praise God that we live in an unusual time and place.

But don't expect that it will last.
Instead take Jesus' warning to heart
so that when persecution comes,
you will be ready to stand firm as a servant of the king.
Jesus has chosen you out of the world.
It's hatred is not about you,
it's about him.
Praise God if you are counted worthy to be hated for his name.