

## 155. The Gospel of John—15:19-20

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### *Hated Without a Cause-Part 4*

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(9/5/21)

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At this point in John's Gospel, we are less than twelve hours from the Cross.

Jesus is using the little time He has left with His disciples to teach them some final lessons about ministry—as they would soon be taking over for Him after His death, resurrection and return to His Father. One of the lessons He wants to drive home to their hearts is the hatred and hostility they would face from the world as they go into it serving God and preaching the Gospel.

Last time in our study we finished our outline covering verses 18-25—but this morning I'd like to revisit part of the text and elaborate a little more on the words of Jesus to His disciples—

#### **John 15:19-20 (NKJV)**

<sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> 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 keep yours also.

These words remind us of what Jesus had told His disciples earlier in His ministry—turn to Matthew 10:

#### **Matthew 10:24-25 (NKJV)**

<sup>24</sup> A disciple is not above *his* teacher, nor a servant above his master. <sup>25</sup> It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *will they call* those of his household!

This antagonism, Jesus said, would lead to persecution against those who belong to Him—but He admonished us three times in this passage (verses 26, 28, 31), "Do not fear".

#### **Matthew 10:32-33 (NKJV)**

<sup>32</sup> "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. <sup>33</sup> But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

This is one of the greatest tests of genuine faith—are you willing to stand up and confess Jesus to a world that will hate you for doing so and will try to silence you any way it can?

The word '**confess**' in the Greek means to "*openly declare your allegiance to*".

To confess Him means more than just declaring His name with your *lips*—it also means to back up your words by living for Him openly with your *life*—and the context is in the face of persecution (Matthew 10:17-25).

One author gives a powerful example of this—

"In his book *I Love Idi Amin*, the author, Festo Kivengere, a leading evangelical minister in Uganda, tells the history of persecution and martyrdom of Christians in that country.



In 1885 three Christian boys, ranging in age from eleven to fifteen, were forced to give their lives for Christ because they would not renounce their faith in Him. The king was adamantly opposed to Christianity and ordered the boys' execution if they did not recant.

At the place of execution, the boys asked that the following message be given to the king: *"Tell his majesty that he has put our bodies in the fire, but we won't be long in the fire. Soon we will be with Jesus, which is much better. But ask him to repent and change his mind or he will land in a place of eternal fire."* As they stood bound and awaiting death, they sang a song that soon became greatly loved by Christians in that country as *"The Martyrs' Song."* One verse testifies:

*O that I had wings like the angels,  
I would fly away and be with Jesus.*

The youngest of the boys, named Yusufu, said, *"Please don't cut off my arms. I will not struggle in the fire that takes me to Jesus."* Because of the boys' testimony that day, forty adults trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, and indirectly countless more converts were won to the Lord over a period of many years. By 1887 a large number of other Christians were martyred, many of them inspired by the fearless, loving testimony of those three boys.

None of those martyrs knew much theology or much about the Bible because most of them were illiterate and all of them were relatively new believers. But they had a deep love for Jesus that they refused to hide, no matter what the cost. As is nearly always the case, those who died were replaced several-fold by new converts who came to Christ because of their testimony".

The point, I believe, the Lord Jesus was making when He said, *"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven"*. (Matthew 10:32-33)

The point He was making is that the test of true saving faith (i.e., whether or not you're really a child of God)—is faithfulness all the way to the end of a person's life—even if that means martyrdom.

A phony Christian won't even *live* for the Lord let alone *die* for Him!

If forced to make a choice whether to renounce Jesus or die—he will deny Him before men to save his own life.

Jesus said, that a man or woman who refused to say they knew Jesus on earth (professing their faith in Him) but rather chose to deny Him before men to save their life—Jesus said *He* would deny that person before His Father (deny knowing him on the day of judgment).

Now this doesn't mean that if you deny an opportunity to confess your relationship with Jesus that you will be judged and sent to hell. Even the Apostle Peter denied the Lord three times—and yet he was eventually martyred for not renouncing his faith in Jesus.

I believe that what the Lord is saying here is that the outward confession of a person's *mouth* backed up with the actions of their *life*—is a reflection of genuine faith in their *heart*.

Not that genuine Christians can't let fear get to them at times (like Peter) where they deny the Lord in a given situation—but the general pattern of their life will be to stand up for the Lord!

Now the Lord goes on to say that that kind of commitment to Him will bring conflict between the believer in Christ and every other person in their life (for the most part) starting with those closest to them—the members of their own family.

**Matthew 10:34 (NKJV)**

<sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.

This, of course, would be an allegorical “sword” of conflict and division—which He then elaborates on in verse 35-36:

**Matthew 10:35-36 (NKJV)**

<sup>35</sup> For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; <sup>36</sup> and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'

The word ‘**against**’ comes from a Greek word that means “to cut in two”. The word denotes a “complete and often permanent separation”.

The cost of true discipleship (which is what Jesus was talking about in John 15:18-25) will often be to drive a wedge between family and friends separating them from one another—sometimes for the rest of their life—

Warren Wiersbe—

*“The only way a believer can escape [this] conflict is to deny Christ and compromise his witness, and this would be sin. Then the believer would be at war with God... We will be misunderstood and persecuted even by those who are the closest to us; yet we must not allow this to affect our witness. It is important that we suffer for Jesus’ sake, and for righteousness’ sake, and not because we ourselves are difficult to live with. There is a difference between the “offense of the cross” (Galatians 5:11) and offensive Christians”.*

Understand, Jesus didn’t say, “Blessed are those who are persecuted when they do wrong or when they’re being obnoxious...”

*He said, “Blessed are you when you’re persecuted for righteousness’ sake.”*

There is a humorous, imaginary story written by Joseph Bayly called *The Gospel Blimp* that illustrates this.

One author explains—

*“The believers in an imaginary town conceive the idea of witnessing by means of a blimp which is to fly over the town trailing Gospel signs and dropping tracts and leaflets called “bombs.” It is a silly idea; no one is ever converted by it. But for a while at least the town is tolerant.*

*Tolerance changes to hostility, however, when the promoters of the project add sound equipment to the blimp and begin bombarding their neighbors with Gospel services broadcast from the air. At this point, according to Bayly, the “persecution” begins.*

*That night the sound equipment of the blimp is sabotaged, and the Christians call it ‘persecution’.*

*Well, it is not persecution. That is Mr. Bayly’s point. It is a provoked response to an unjustified invasion of privacy. And, similarly, it is not persecution today when Christians are snubbed for pushing tracts onto people who do not want them, or for intruding into their affairs when they are not invited, and so on.*

*The only persecution that God recognizes as blessed is the kind that comes from living a righteous life—like Jesus and for declaring the Gospel in the power of the Spirit.”*

The author has put his finger on a problem that has plagued the Christian Church for many years—obnoxious Christians who think that *pushing* their faith onto the people of the world is *righteous* behavior.

But that behavior has caused many unbelievers to hate us “*with a cause*” instead of what Jesus said should be the case—that living a righteous life in this fallen world (as He did) would cause the world to hate us “*without a cause*” (unprovoked)!

Peter reminded us that when the world hates you, make sure it hates you because you’re living a righteous life like Jesus—and not an “in your face” obnoxious life like so many who claim to represent Him but don’t—

**1 Peter 3:15-17 (NLT2)**

<sup>15</sup> ... worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. <sup>16</sup> But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. <sup>17</sup> Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!

So, the commitment required to be a disciple of Christ and the resulting consequences are *not* trivial—that’s why Jesus admonished us to “*count the cost*” before becoming one of His disciples. But He goes on to say that if you decide to make that commitment to Him know this—it is absolute and non-negotiable—

**Matthew 10:37 (NKJV)**

<sup>37</sup> He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

**Jesus must be our ‘first love’ (*supreme above all else*).**

The kind of love that Jesus is referring to here isn’t feelings or emotional—***it’s a commitment***.

Now there are those who would read this statement by Jesus in Matthew 10:37 and call us a ‘cult’ that is trying to *divide* and *destroy* families.

The reality is that when we love Jesus more than anyone or anything else and we follow all He taught us to do as His disciples in sacrificing ourselves for others as He did—guess what?!

It will make us *better* husbands, fathers, wives, mothers, sons, daughters and so forth.

Yet there are times when our relationship with Jesus will divide rather than unify—but that is not our fault—it isn’t something we want—it’s just the reality of darkness wanting to separate itself from the light. (John 3:18-21) So, our love for Jesus must supersede all other loves in our lives—including the love of self.

This is what the Lord goes on to say in verses 38-39—

**Matthew 10:38-39 (NKJV)**

<sup>38</sup> And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>39</sup> He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

What exactly did the Lord mean when He said this? What kind of death is He referring to?

- It means to *die* to our rights, our comforts, our interests, our will, and our goals.
- It means to *die* to all our hopes and dreams—to everything that is of self!
- To “**die**” means to ‘*lay it all down*’, ‘*to give it all up*’, ‘*to let it all go*.’

In other words, the Lord is giving all of us a choice—He is saying “*give up your earthly life now to live, to serve, to suffer and if need be to die for My sake—and you will spend eternity with Me in heaven*”.

Or Jesus is saying, “*You can live for yourself now, for your pleasures, your goals, your self-fulfillment—and be separated from Me forever in hell*”.

He would add something to think about in Chapter 16 for all those who are contemplating choosing the latter—

**Matthew 16:26 (NLT)**

<sup>26</sup> And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?

Let’s broaden our scope from the world hating us as Jesus’ disciples and persecuting us simply because we belong to Him (“hating us without a cause”)—to include *suffering* for Christ in general as children of God.

**Romans 8:17-18 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. <sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Suffering for Jesus’ sake is something very few Christians in America know much if anything about—that may change.

Many Christians are troubled by the idea that God would let His children suffer in this life—they reason how a loving Father could allow this?

C.S. Lewis in writing on suffering had some very insightful things to say about it—

*“Now God Who has made us knows what we are and that our happiness lies in Him. Yet we will not seek it in Him. As long as He leaves us any other resort where we can even plausibly look for it. While what we call our own life remains agreeable we will not surrender it to Him. So what can God do in our own best interests but make our own life less agreeable to us and take away the plausible sources of false happiness.”*

In other words, sometimes God needs to help us see (way down inside), that what we thought our happiness and joy is all about was in reality—nothing but an illusion.

Our real happiness is only found in Him and in living for Him—everything else in life contains only the empty promise of happiness and fulfillment—or as Solomon put it so well in the Book of Ecclesiastes—“*Everything in this life apart from God is emptiness and vanity!*”

I believe that is what the LORD is currently doing with America, a nation that has become an idol for many Christians (an object of worship)—I think He is prying it from our hands to force us to cling to the Kingdom of God!

Please don’t misunderstand me—I love this country, and I know I speak for all Christians living in America—we are thankful for the country God has given us to live in!

But listen—***America is NOT a Christian nation***—America is the world!

As James tells us—“*If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.*” (James 4:4)

Unfortunately, many Christians have more love and loyalty to the country of America that they do for the Kingdom of God.

Now let me qualify that statement by saying that the two are *not* mutually exclusive—we can love both and be good citizens of both—as Jesus taught us: “*give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.*” (Matthew 22:21)

What Jesus was teaching us as His people is that—it is possible to be citizens of two kingdoms—but only one can be supreme in our hearts. Paul the Apostle affirmed this when he said—

**Philippians 3:20 (NKJV)**

<sup>20</sup> For our citizenship [politics] is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

Although Peter did admonish us to—“*Fear God. Honor the king.*”

Which means we should learn to have a balance between the earthly kingdom we live in on earth and the heavenly Kingdom we have been born into.

This balance used to be a lot easier to walk than it is today.

For many years in our country’s existence—our nation’s principles and biblical principles paralleled one another. This caused many Christians to conflate the Kingdom of God with the kingdom of America—in other words, they believed that the two were almost ‘interchangeable’ to the point that many believed—to be an American was tantamount to being a Christian and vice versa.

However, in the last generation or two, that has changed to the point that many of America’s values now run contrary to God’s values. The result has been that many of our fellow Americans now hate us and are beginning to turn against us like never before.

This has caused many professing Christians to be ‘caught on the horns of a dilemma’—and by that I mean, they are being forced to choose what kingdom they are really loyal to—the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of America!

Those of us who are declaring our loyalty to the Kingdom of God and are standing up for Jesus Christ are starting to see suffering and persecution like never before in our lifetime—and it’s only going to get worse.

However, the Bible reminds us, in Romans 8:17-18, that suffering and glory go together—they are married to one another. Or to put it another way—the sufferings in this life are the birth pangs of glory in the next.

Again, the Apostle Paul put things into perspective—

**2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, <sup>18</sup> while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

Many American Christians don’t look at it that way—they want joy without tribulation, heavenly rewards without earthly suffering, Resurrection Sunday without Crucifixion Friday. If Christianity is all about following Jesus, then realize that as Jesus was the suffering Servant—so must we be also.

I’d like to take one more week to talk about suffering and the Christian life.

Let me set-up next week's study by saying that—suffering in the Christian's life can take different forms—

1. *There is suffering that is the result of sin (we're not talking about that).*
2. *There is suffering that we endure for Jesus' sake (John 15:18-25).*
3. *There is suffering that comes because we live in a fallen, violent world.*
4. *There is suffering because we live in bodies that are a product of the fall, that wear out, grow old, get sick and will eventually die.*

Now, even though suffering is just a fact of the Christian life, and even though it is talked about from one end of the Bible to the other—most Christians in this country know little about it.

The reason for that is because—**it doesn't cost us much in America to believe in Jesus—we don't really need to 'count the cost'**—again, I believe that will change.

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