

# The Densest Moment | Jesus Christ's Farewell Conversation

## "Out of the World" or "The World Hates You"

John 15.17 – 16.4

3.5.23

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

<sup>18</sup> *"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> "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. <sup>20</sup> "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. <sup>21</sup> "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. <sup>22</sup> "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup> "He who hates Me hates My Father also. <sup>24</sup> "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. <sup>25</sup> "But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'*

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

*"These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. <sup>2</sup> "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. <sup>3</sup> "These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. <sup>4</sup> "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 Upper Room Discourse***, one of the long speeches delivered by Jesus Christ during the three years of His work, leading to the Crucifixion. This discourse is a little different from some of the others in that it has a conversational tone (the disciples ask questions) AND it ends with the longest recorded prayer of Jesus Christ (CH 17). And it takes place on the night of His arrest.

Last week we heard Jesus preemptively confront a fear He saw coming for His disciples, namely, that when they saw Him crucified, they'd feel serious regret that they'd wasted the three years spent with this Teacher now exposed as an imposter. Jesus counteracts the coming fear, promising the opposite of a wasted life; He offers the fruitful life – *"dwell in Me and you WILL bear much fruit"* (life invested in Me WON'T be wasted).

Today, the Teacher, like a loving parent preparing His children for a coming ordeal, Jesus Christ addresses another fear that He sees coming and that is opposition to them and to their message in the time after the Crucifixion and resurrection. They're NOT yet prepared for the conflict that awaits them. It's not that they're strangers to hostility – they saw it aimed at their Teacher.

They expect to be big-shot government officials, but they won't be (at least for now) but the good news is that the world will hate them! They're not going from being famous to NOT being unknown; they'll be ... HATED by the world.

The question I want to ask today is: Are Christians hated today as they were at the start? AND if they are hated, what causes of that opposition? And is there any upside to this whole issue – are there reasons to expect help in our conflict with world and how might that expectation of help change the way we go about dealing with hate?

**Let's look at:**

- 1) The Fact of Hatred**
- 2) The Causes of Hatred**
- 3) Reasons for JOY Even in the Face of Hatred**

There does seem to be a consensus that Christians were a persecuted group from the start. There will always be “flat-earthers” and Holocaust-deniers but, any sane historian recognizes widespread persecution of Christians under Nero (who blamed the Christians for *The Great Fire of Rome* in 64AD) and official persecution by all the emperors until the *Edict of Milan* under Constantine (313AD).

Jesus Himself was persecuted by Jewish leaders starting with His rejection at His home synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4 et al). His detractors were mainly religious people until the end it when a joint effort of Jews AND Romans attempted to silence Him forever. They were, of course, unsuccessful.

Persecution is seen in the earliest Christian history, *The Book of Acts*. The sources of hostility for the earliest Christians were Jewish religious leaders and Greeks. This is summarized in St Paul's words, “*For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness....*” (1 Cor. 1.22-24)

All Christians are warned by Jesus and the Apostles that opposition is to be expected in the Christian-life: “*All who desire to live a godly life in Christ will suffer persecution*” (2 Tim 3.12)

The singular source to which Jesus Christ points is that is what He calls “the world”. That phrase denotes the whole system of life developed by fallen humanity in opposition to God. It's the impulse that led to *The Tower of Babel* (Gen 11) – the futile attempt to build civilization independent of the one true and living God.

It's important to note that “the world” is NOT necessarily anti-religion. In fact: all religion outside of faith in Jesus Christ and attachment to the God of Israel is “worldly” or of that system Jesus refers to as “the world” promoted by the “prince of this world”, the devil (John 8.44) so Jesus told the Jewish leaders, “*You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.*”

In this section of the *Discourse*, Jesus Christ’s warnings focus primarily on persecution *arising from adherents of pseudo-Jewish religion*. They were the initial agents of “the world” opposing the Church in the first centuries of the Christian faith – religious people.

In other words, in as much as the religious leaders opposing Jesus Christ, were NOT living by trust in the God of Abraham... in as much as they had turned “the faith of the Fathers” into a way of avoiding God – they were worldly religious people.

The question is: what did the Christians do or say that made the world NOT simply opt out of Christianity or to choose some other way of life but to HATE Christians?

The answer to that question is Christ Himself: “*if the world hated ME (and the world surely DID hate Him) they will also hate you...*” The religious world and the secular world hated Me and to the degree that you disciples represent Me and what I stood for, the world will also hate you.”

Christianity is the Third Way. It’s not like worldly religion (trying to placate God and thus stave Him off) and not like worldly irreligion (that seeks life outside of God). The Way of Jesus is the Way of total dependence on God. Religion tries to assign WORTH to a person who follows the rules, persons who keep God’s laws so that God is happy with them and so that God won’t take their stuff like health and jobs and money and personal autonomy.

Irreligion, whether it’s Greek philosophy or the *American Dream* or immorality and the party life – secular and non-religious people are also trying to live independent of God because THAT is the spirit of Babel.

Jesus Christ came on the scene saying, “You are using the Law and your ‘*obedience*’ to it to please God so that God would leave you alone. You’re not relying on God in humble trust; you’re depending on your efforts and then congratulating yourself and looking down on “worldly” people. BUT in reality, if worldliness is living autonomous from God YOU ARE JUST AS WORLDLY as they are!

Instead, Jesus Christ pointed religious people to the fact that their law-keeping was NOT all that great. Their hard work did NOT result in loving reliance on God and love for other people – it was only self-congratulatory and proud.

“Your problem, said Jesus, is that you’ve reduced God’s commands to something you and your kind can keep and for which you believe God owes you good things. Your own selfishness and the submerged anti-God impulse in you is much deeper and evil than you’ve imagined.

My life exposes you; that you keep the Law outwardly and to be seen by people and to protect yourselves from unwanted incursions into your life by the disruptive God whom I call “Father”.

And when the religious world, the prevailing Jewish approach AND the prevailing pagan approach, when the world sees YOU MEN aware of your own sin and willingly admitting that YOU CAN'T KEEP GOD'S LAW and you need and depend upon Someone else to do for you what you cannot do for yourself – you'll really upset the applecart.

Your very lives will be NOT religious (in the current sense) and not immoral (“let's eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die” Isa 22.13; 1 Cor 15.32 – YOLO!) you'll be perceived as a threat to the world – the impulse to live free from God.

People won't know what to do with you and they'll even tell themselves that by killing you they're doing a service to God Himself. They'll excommunicate you from the synagogues and you'll be rejected as an enemy to society.

The world has two options – religion leading to arrogance and irreligion that leads to escapism but BOTH are simply ways of avoiding God.

I'm exposing religious people for NOT keeping God's Law and grossly underestimating the holiness of God who hates evil in all its forms... AND I'm exposing escapism as a way of numbing yourself to reality and the deeper questions of life – another alternative to God.

*I've come to show you* what the human life was supposed to look like – I've lived the life of LOVE that no one has ever lived but that ALL are required to live. BUT My coming is not simply to be an example for you to follow – it's a life lived NOT primarily as an example but as an ATONEMENT.

I came to live life FOR you... I've come to apply MY merits to YOUR record; to live the life you're required to live FOR you! AND I've come to die under the sentence of wrath and justice that YOU DESERVE. And to have these benefits applied to YOU, you need only face your shortcomings and confess your NEED.

But Jesus Christ is warning them – “religious people don't WANT to face their need and hate to admit that they're failed people who deserve punishment. Immoral people are probably better at seeing their need but they can't imagine that the pleasures of knowing God, now and in eternity, are infinitely better than their escapism.

And that brings us to our final point, namely, how Jesus equips them (and us as well) with a mindset and an approach to the world's hatred.

First, don't be surprised by this hatred. The people of Jesus are called OUT of the world and the world will see you as a traitor. You're no longer OF the world. You'll tell them that YOU are worse than they are but

they'll hear you saying, "I'm better than you are." The world has no category for grace, it doesn't speak that language.

You'll talk about God somehow taking up residence in you and sweetly alluring you again and again away from what God hates but they will hear you saying, "I just try harder than you do...you just need to do MORE like I do!" The world has no category for being possessed by the Spirit of Holiness Himself who somehow expresses Himself through our own individual personalities.

"They hated Me without cause" says Jesus, quoting at least two of the Psalms (35.19; 69.4).

And the not-so-subtle implication is "Don't give them cause". As the Apostle later wrote, *"If you're reviled for the name of Christ, you're blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he's not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name."* (1 Pet. 4.14-16)

In other words, "Don't be quick to say, 'Oh...this guy at work hates me for being a Christian' when in reality, he hates that you whine and complain how bad things are or he doesn't like your politics. Is it *"the Spirit of glory and of God resting on you"* that this person reviles or is it your stealing the boss' time so you can "witness" on the job?

The world has to see our readiness to admit OUR sins and mistakes because THAT'S the very thing God may use to help a person see "God's glory in my weakness" (1 Cor 1.27, 2 Cor 12.10).

You may say in a conversation that there's only ONE WAY to God. Is that true?

Yes – "there is no other Name given under heaven by which people must be saved." (Acts 4.12) That truth comes up every time the Gospel is proclaimed in *The Book of Acts*... AND, your not-yet-Christian friend will THINK, "Ah! That guy thinks he's figured it all out – how truly smug and arrogant." SO, be quick to add, "I KNOW! Isn't that C R A Z Y that a person as morally messed up as I should be claimed by God!"

In other words, if you really believe that Jesus Christ is the only reason you're acceptable to God then boast in YOUR weakness and in GOD'S strength. Be quick to confess YOUR faults and GOD'S grace. Be free to say, "I couldn't get to God – too sinful and blind – so God came to ME!"

We should also celebrate – WE ARE NOT ALONE! We have the love of the brethren. John's Gospel stresses "love, love, love, love," and then, here, suddenly "HATE"; it's jarring but LOVE is the big idea! "Love one another" (15.17) IS thē command or rule of Jesus).

AND we should ALSO celebrate that we're not left as orphans defending God by our tenacious willpower and strategies – NO! The Helper is with us in this.

Salvation came to us *“extra nos”* (from outside ourselves, alien to us); God gives us an alien righteousness – the record of Jesus is applied to me – NOT a righteousness I achieved independent from God. AND an alien Spirit is mysteriously at work in my conversations with people who are still of the world. *“The Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me.”*

The last thing I’ll say is that we have brothers and sisters in the world – China, N. Korea, the Islamic Belt, Nigeria, India, Cuba – who are facing the real thing... We have the privilege of uniting with them in prayer.

Let’s stand with them... learn about them... help them as we’re able... Let me pray for them now.

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

But Jesus announces a “new commandment,” the very heart of his ministry. *Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another...*

This commandment has all the combined force of the old ones plus some. Not unlike when Jesus said, “Be perfect,” or “Do not worry,” this “new commandment” is pure, holy, good, and patently impossible to follow. Author Muriel Spark points this out in a brilliant passage from her novel, *The Comforters*:

“The demands of the Christian religion are exorbitant, they are outrageous. Christians who don’t realize that from the start are not faithful. They are dishonest; their teachers are talking in their sleep. “Love one another ... brethren, beloved ... your brother, neighbours, love, love, love” — do they know what they are saying?”

- C.J. Green, “The Exorbitant Demand of Christianity”  
(online article, 2.17.23, MBird.com)

Then said Evangelist, "If this be thy condition, why standest thou still?"

He answered, "Because I know not whither to go." Then he gave him a parchment roll, and there was written within, "Flee from the wrath to come..."

So, I saw in my dream that the man began to run. Now, he had not run far from his own door, when his wife and children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, "Life! life! eternal life!" So, he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain.

The neighbors also came out to see him run; and as he ran, some mocked, others threatened, and some cried after him to return...

-- John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come* (1678; CH 1)