

**Last Words, Lasting Presence**  
**Jesus and the Disciples at the Last Supper**  
**Part Five: A Life as a Citizen of Heaven**  
**John 15.18-16.33**

**March 27, 2020**

**David Henderson**

Have you ever had a wait-what moment?

Somebody is talking, and what is coming out of their mouths is perfectly sane and reasonable, and then all of a sudden they say something that stops you in your tracks and has you saying “Wait! What?”

We’ve been walking our way through the last conversation Jesus had with his disciples on the night before he died on the cross. It is his charter for the church as he prepares to leave them, in which he lays out for them the sort of people he calls them to be, and the sort of life he calls them to live, and the sort of help he promises to provide for them.

And then we come to this wait-what moment:

John 15.18-19

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 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.

Wait! What? The world hates us?

Whenever we have a wait-what reaction like that we want to stop the conversation and go back and make sure we heard it right, and that we’ve understood what Jesus is saying and what he’s not saying. These words are hard enough without having to cross language and cultural barriers too.

As we desire to get some clarity about what he was and wasn’t saying, here are a couple of bits of background that might be helpful as we are trying to understand this hard saying.

First, when Jesus uses the word “world” here and in other parts of John’s gospel, he doesn’t mean the physical planet, and he’s not referring to humanity as a whole.

John actually clarifies who he means when he uses the word in the opening paragraphs of his gospel:

John 1.9-11

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

The “world” is the portion of humanity and of humanity’s structures that refuses to make a place for God or take him seriously, and that fails to recognize Jesus as his son.

About *that* world, the world whose hearts are closed to God, Jesus says:

John 15.18-19

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 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***.

Jesus says the world hates us. What does he mean by hate?

Does every person who excludes God or reject his claims have outright hostility toward us? Not necessarily. Often I think the unbelieving world views the church with something closer to dismissive indifference.

That fits with the word Jesus uses here when he says the world will hate us. The basic idea is that the world will hold us in low esteem. Compared to the things it values and loves, it will see us as unimportant.

And that low regard for us will find expression in a whole wide range of responses, everything from amused dismissal or uncaring disregard to outright hate and hostility.

So as Jesus prepares his followers to carry on without him, he tells them they can expect a cool welcome at best, and a hostile rejection at worse, from a good portion of the world, because the world values other less important things.

**So, in the light of this comment from Jesus, the question we’re answering this morning is:**

**How do we live as followers of Christ in a world that is hostile to us? How, in a world that dismisses us, are we supposed to relate?**

How do you answer that question?

I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about this over the past couple of years. I know many of you have been wrestling with this question as well, and I’d love to hear the conclusions you’re arriving at.

I think if I were to try to frame in what I believe is a biblical way a way of thinking about how to live as a follower of Christ in a hostile world, there are five key principles that I would want to highlight.

They all are about seeking clarity. This is such a cloudy and complicated question, and its one that has shown itself to be divisive. What does it mean to think in a clear biblical way about these really complex and challenging things?

Here's what I would like to suggest are the things we need to clarify. I'll look forward to hearing your thoughts about them.

### **1. We need to be clear about why the world views us the way it does.**

Why does the world hate us? What is causing the offense?

Well, there are two possible answers to that.

One is that we're being hated or dismissed for the right reasons.

In an essay he wrote called "The Decline of Religion," CS Lewis captures those reasons in an incredibly insightful way:

As the real meaning of the Christian claim becomes apparent, its demand for total surrender, the sheer chasm between Nature and Supernature, men are increasingly offended. Dislike, terror, and finally hatred [follow]: none who will not give what it asks (and it asks all) can endure it: all who are not with it are against it. (*God in the Docks*, "The Decline of Religion," 243)

Listen to these words of Paul that compare us to captives who were defeated in battle and are being led to our deaths.

II Corinthians 2.14-16

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life.

Why the stench of death? Because there is a death that stands at the center of the Christian faith.

Not just the death of Jesus, which is offensive enough, but *my* death, *your* death, the death of every follower of Christ!

Mark 8.34-37

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Is there a more offensive idea for a non-Christian than the idea of dying to self? I know it was repulsive to me when I was an atheist.

It is only when you come to faith that you recognize how sweet it is to lay down your life for him, because it is the thing he did for us, and it is the thing for which we were made.

II Corinthians 5.15

And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

The world should hate us because Jesus and his claims cause offense – and they will – but not because we in *our* words and actions cause offense.

Jesus's sweeping claim on our lives, his insistence that we will one day have to answer to God, his declaration that we are under God's judgment and need a rescuer, his call to take up our crosses and follow him: that is offense enough.

We don't need to add our being pushy or rude or belittling, our impugning motives or assuming the worst, our drawing our swords or our tearing people apart with our words on social media, to the offense.

We've talked about how the world views us. Now we need to go back and . . .

## **2. We need to be clear about how we view the world.**

Just because the world hates us doesn't mean we need to hate the world.

One of the first relational principles of the Christian faith is that we do not relate to others on the basis of how *they* relate to us. We relate to others on the basis of how *God* relates to us.

When it comes down to it, we can see the world in one of two ways.

We can see it through the lens of John 15.19

### **The world as seen through John 15.18-19**



### John 15.18-19

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 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***.

The world hates you. It has it out for you. A fist captures its posture perfectly. I suppose if you were a cartographer you might call this a Fistiform Projection of the globe.

The unbelieving world hates me. So I'll hate the unbelieving world. That's the image I carry around with me of the world – a fist.

Or we can see the world through the lens of John 3.16

### The world as seen through John 3.16



### John 3.16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

In the world of mapmaking this is called a Cordiform Projection, which means “heart-shaped.” It was a way of drawing the world that became popular when the new world was discovered.

Instead of saying, well, because the unbelieving world hates me, I’ll hate the unbelieving world, I can choose to look at the world the way *God* does. God loves the world, so I will look at the world the way God looks at the world.

Think of what would happen if this was the lens through which you saw the world? If every time you thought of the world, it was this image, a heart and not a fist, that came to mind?

How do you see the world? The way the world sees you? Or the way God sees the world?

## **2. We also need to be clear about who we are and whose we are in this world.**

Listen to one of the most remarkable pairs of passages to be found anywhere in Scripture.

John 8.23 Jesus says to his hearers  
 You are from below. I am from above.  
 You are of this world. I am not of this world.

By this Jesus draws a line between himself and every other human being who has ever lived.

But then listen to these words in

John 15.18-19 where Jesus says to his followers, at the end of his ministry among them  
 If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ***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.

Now he draws the line in a new place! Jesus says that as result of his hand on our lives and his redemptive work, our essential nature has changed. We used to belong to this world. But now we belong with him to a completely different realm! We used to be citizens of this world. Now we are citizens of heaven! Jesus has brought us into his realm, under his reign.

That brings us to a paradox in the teachings of Jesus.

We no longer belong to this world. But we’re still in it. And we’re right where he wants us to be, and right where he intends us to stay until we fulfill God’s kingdom purposes for being here. Why doesn’t he just take us home? What are those purposes?

He picks the theme up in chapter 17, in the prayer that makes up the whole last chapter of this talk. Jesus prays:

**John 17.11, 14-18**

I will remain in the world no longer, but ***they are still in the world***. . . I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for ***they are not of the world any more than I am of the world***. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

**John 17.16-17**

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ***As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world***.

We are called not to be *distant* from the world. We are called to stay in close proximity to the world. In fact, Jesus says we're not just in it, we're *sent* to it.

That means we don't pull out and isolate ourselves in an exclusively Christian world, or surround ourselves exclusively with Christian friends, until we finally go to be with Jesus. We are called to be *in* this world, we are sent into it, to rub shoulders with this world, living life in the midst of this world. Why? To put the kingdom on display, and to advance the kingdom. And we can't do that, we can't reach a world we're sent to, if we don't wade into it.

So we're called not to be distant from the world. But at the same time, we are called to be *distinct* from the world. The allegiances of our hearts will look completely different from those that characterize a world that does not respect or look to God.

Jesus prays to the Father that we would be *sanctified* by the word. Sanctified means "made holy." You've heard me say that being holy doesn't just mean living by a strict moral code. It means being distinctive – specifically, it means being distinctive *as a result of the presence and work of God in my life*. God present in me sets me apart, makes me different.

And in II Corinthians 3.18

And we all, who with unveiled faces . . . are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

That's a good shorthand way to understand what it means to be sanctified. Being sanctified is becoming like Jesus.

As Paul says in Romans 8.29:

God chose [us] to become like his Son

We are called to be the oddball sitting in the next desk, the strange person in the cubicle down the hall, or at the table in the board room, or in front of the classroom, or in the

house across the street, right in there among everyone else, strange because our lives are marked by such unfamiliar qualities as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and the mastery of the Spirit from within. (Galatians 5.22-23)

The very same qualities that marked Jesus.

Are you clear about whose you are, and why you are still here?

Which leads directly to the next point.

### **3. We need to be clear about our essential calling toward the world.**

We are not just sent to the world. We are sent to the world *in love*.

As we've said again and again over the past two Sundays: as agents and representatives of Jesus, we are called to a life of love,

#### **John 13.34-35**

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Love is the thing that will set us apart as ones who belong to Jesus.

It's the theme with which he begins this final message in chapter 13, and it's the theme he ends with in his closing prayer in chapter 17.

#### **John 17.25-26**

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order **that the love you have for me may be in them** and that I myself may be in them.

Our love is *the* marker that we are his, *the* proof that we belong to him. It is the thing by which we will be known as ones who belong to him, and it's the way he will be known to the world.

Which brings us to a really important question.

There are so many definitions of love. What does Jesus mean when he calls us to a life of love (Ephesians 5.1)? And what do we mean when we say we want to be a church known more for our love than for anything else?

We are called to live a life of love in a world that is hostile to us. What does that mean?



I think it might be helpful first to clarify what love isn't.

There are two extremes we can fall toward.

Contrary to what the world says, love is not the same thing as **indiscriminate acceptance**. I think that's the basic idea that is meant to be communicated through the phrase "Love is love." **Indiscriminate acceptance**. But as followers of Christ we just don't believe that whatever makes you happy is what makes God happy, that you do you is the best way to live.

But, contrary to what some parts of the Christian church says, neither is love the same thing as **unaccepting judgment**.

Out of fear that we are communicating that we approve of someone's sin we feel we need to withhold acceptance from people whose choices we don't agree with.

We have to get past the unbiblical idea that for me to accept you and welcome you and create a place for you in my heart is for me to condone your sin.

Think of how Jesus accepted us. Somehow he made it clear that he didn't condone sin, but nonetheless his arms were wide open – to sinners, tax collectors, drunkards, prostitutes . . . and us.

Rather than withholding his love until we were acceptable, Jesus made us acceptable by loving us.

Romans 15.7

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

In addition to feeling that we have to be crystal clear in our stance on someone else's sin, I think we can also fall into thinking it's our job to convict the world of its sin. But in John 16, Jesus says that's the job of the Spirit, not our job:

John 16.8

When he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

In Ephesians 4.15 Paul calls us to speak the truth in love.

I think sometimes Christians have gotten confused and we've thought Paul said we should speak the truth as love instead of speak the truth in love.

We've thought that by holding up the word of God and speaking harshly to the unbelieving world, that by hitting the world with the truth, we were loving it.

But Paul says, “speaking the truth *in* love.”

And Paul sure isn't at a loss when it comes to understanding what love is. Just reread I Corinthians 13.1

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

So what is love?

As I understand it, Biblical love is *always* marked by two essential dimensions:

1. deep care and regard for the person:
2. and deep willingness to sacrifice for that person:

Love is wanting the best for the other person, and being willing to seek the best for that other person even when it costs us.

The second part, a willingness to put others first at cost to ourselves, is clear enough, even if it is challenging to live out.

But what about wanting the best for someone? What if your definition of what's best collides with mine? Whose best then? Isn't that where so much of the tension lies?

I think the difficulty gets cleared up when we think in terms of wanting *God's* best for someone.

In the Message paraphrase, that's Paul's prayer for Philemon in Philemon 1.3:  
God's best to you! Christ's blessings on you!.

Then it's not about me trying to impose something on you, or pressuring you to see something a certain way, or trying to get you to conform your life to a certain standard.

It's about me trying to speak and live in such a way that I reflect the heart of God to you, so that your heart becomes open to how God sees you, and what God has done for you in Christ, and what God desires of us both.

So love rightly understood from a biblical perspective is me wanting God's best for you, and being willing to seek that even when it costs me.

Which leads directly to the next point of clarity . . .

**4. We need to be clear about when that call to love applies and who that call to love applies to.**

There is a remarkably indiscriminate quality to the love we are called to show this world.

Jesus doesn't say, "Love your neighbor . . . unless you are were particularly aggrieved, or feel especially hurt, or feel like you've *really* been mistreated. Then you can go for blood."

He says **Luke 6.27-36**

But I tell you who hear me: ***Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*** If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

I think that last section is one of the most overlooked parts of Jesus's teaching. He says that when we show this kind of accepting love even to those who dismiss us or are hostile toward us, we are showing that we are part of the same family as God himself, we are his offspring, marked by the same qualities, having the same heart. We are merciful just like our Father is.

Again Jesus emphasizes the revelatory nature of our love. When we love, we reveal. We reveal not tht just that we are his. We reveal *him!*

That's why it is so important that we not excuse in ourselves behavior that Jesus does not excuse in us. We want to make exceptions for ourselves. "Yes, but you don't understand. Here's why it's okay for me to ignore the call to love in this situation, why me getting angry and ramping up with power and going after someone is acceptable."

Premise A. Luke 6.27

Do good to those who hate you.

Premise B. John 15.19

The world hates you.

Therefore, Premise C, we are called to . . . do good to the world.

Related to that, finally,

## **5. We need to be clear about what we are fighting against and what we are fighting with.**

I sense a lot of people in the evangelical church think of our engagement with the unbelieving world in terms of "fighting."

Have you ever done a word study on the word "fight" in the New Testament? It's interesting what you discover.

In the Old Testament, the word “fight” is used 117 times. In the New Testament, only 11. That tells us something important, I think, especially when we remember that ancient Israel was under the control of an armed occupying army, and that they had to pay terribly high taxes to an oppressive Roman emperor, and that the Greco-Roman culture that was seeping into their world was much more permissive and morally loose than their own. They had a lot to fight over.

Of those eleven references to fighting in the New Testament:

- Four of them were about fighting the good fight, which is really about fighting against ourselves to remain faithful and disciplined as followers of Christ (I Cor 9.26, I Tim 1.18 and 6.12, II Tim 4.7)
- Two of them are about the fighting and quarreling between ourselves which happen when we lose sight of God’s trustworthiness
- and only one is about Christians fighting against the world, and this is what it says

John 18.36

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But my kingdom is from another place.”

There’s no place I can find where we are encouraged to frame our interaction with the unbelieving world in terms of a fight, certainly not in the New Testament.

And I think faithful biblical interpretation requires that we read the Old Testament through the New Testament and not merely alongside it, as if every word of it still applied equally today. What about the temple, and the sacrificial system, and ritual cleansing?

Moses throughout the Old Testament repeatedly called his people to take up the sword. But Jesus in the New Testament tells his followers to put down the sword.

Matthew 26.50-52

The men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

We need to be really careful about building a theology of culture wars from the Old Testament.

**So we’re clear about what we are fighting against. We also need to be clear about what we are fighting with.**

II Corinthians 10.3-4

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

Not all of the tools of the world are available to us. In fact, contrary to the ends-justify-the-means way of thinking that has seeped into the evangelical world, few of them are.

In the ancient world the zealots used the weapons of this world to fight their spiritual battles. They carried small knives called *sicarii* and they ambushed, attacked and killed Roman soldiers.

They were held in bondage through weapons of war, so they believed they were justified when they fought for their freedom using the same weapons of war.

Evangelicals can do just the same thing. We are attacked through scathing words on social media, so we attack back with scathing words on social media. We are attacked through power plays in city government, so we attack back through power plays in city government..

The world uses sarcasm, personal attacks, ramping up in power, and threats, and unfortunately sometimes so do we, especially when we feel our rights and our freedoms are threatened.

Consider the counter cultural example of Jesus himself when the world sought to bring down his fledgling movement.

I Peter 2.20-23

If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. . . . When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

When we engage the unbelieving world, I just want to encourage us again to consider which birth narrative we are living out of: the birth of our nation, which is about fighting for rights and insisting on freedoms, or the birth of the kingdom, which, as Paul reminds us in Philippians chapter two, is about laying down our rights, putting the other first, and finding our freedom in God's service? They are two very different stories of freedom and they lead to two very different ways of relating to the unbelieving world.

In his book *The Politics of the Cross*, Daniel Williams raises some wonderfully challenging questions along these lines. He writes:

What is the purpose of Christian engagement in the political system? Is it to save the nation from immorality? Is it to protect the rights of Christians? Is it to bring civil law into closer conformity with the laws of God?

While these goals . . . may have their place, they fall short of the fundamental purpose of all of life, which is to glorify God. . . . So the first question a Christian should ask about politics is this: What type of political stance would most glorify God? (7)

The Bible is quite clear that God has already established a political order and it is called “the kingdom of God.” . . .

But it is a kingdom that God brought about not through conquest or majority vote but through the weakness of the cross, and it is a kingdom that Jesus’s followers enter by dying to themselves and suffering for the sake of the kingdom. Just as Jesus was glorified through the shame of the cross, so, too, will his followers glorify God and reveal God’s kingdom to others when they die to themselves. (8)

The cross gives a radically different rationale for Christian political participation, because it demonstrates that we do not win through displays of power. . . . Our sovereign king is already on the throne. We therefore do not need to vote out of fear or an anxious desire for self-protection. . . . When we vote we are not trying to force others to comply with the mandate of our king. . . .

Our task is simply to reveal God’s kingdom to others, something that we do in our daily work, in our conversation with others, and even in the voting booth. We can do this by showing in some small measure what God’s righteous order might look like – a demonstration that is probably best accomplished by a demonstration of love for neighbor.

If we seek our own interests rather than the interest of others in our ballot choices, we are not acting in accordance with the mandate of God’s kingdom. . . . Instead of thinking about how best to protect our own rights and interests or how to seize and preserve power for ourselves, our concerns will be guided by the question: How can I best love my neighbors? (9)

We live in a world hostile to our faith. But we don’t have to guess how we are called to respond. The Scriptures guide us in engaging our world with a life of love. The clearer we are on who we are, how we are to view this world to which we are called, and why we are here, the greater will be our faithfulness to the one whom to love is to obey.

And the best way to love the world as we are called to is by lifting our eyes off of the strife and stress of this world and to rest them on the one who is seated on the throne in the middle of this world, ruling over all in holiness and love. Let’s conclude our service by bowing before him and worshiping the one who loves us, who died for us, who reigned over us, the one to whom we belong.