

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: Spain has a lot of vineyards. I read several years ago that wine-making is a \$2.4 billion industry there. It is Europe's largest grape-growing nation. But I read that there is a serious problem there in Spain. Global warming is severely threatening the grapes of southern Spain. I read this: *The growing temperature is such a threat to Spanish wine because it significantly changes the biological processes. Heat and sunlight increase sugar levels in wine grapes, which can boost alcohol content beyond what is palatable. Hotter weather may also curb grape acidity, change the flavor of the wine.*"
- B. That reminds me of our text today. We've been studying John 15, where Jesus teaches us that he is the vine and we are the branches, and that our mission as his disciples is to "bear much fruit." But now in this passage before us today, the vine and branches face a severe case of global warming, or to put it plainly, the hot and fierce hatred of the world. **As his disciples Jesus gives us life, and that life in us is meant to bear fruit. But we must bear fruit for Jesus in a very hostile climate, because this world hates Jesus and hates the followers of Jesus.** Turn to **Jn 15:18-16:4...**

I. CHRISTIANS MUST EXPECT THE WORLD'S HATRED (15:18-25)

- A. John speaks of "the world" 105 times in his writings, 74 times in this gospel, often quoting Jesus. And he almost never means the big, wide world. As D. A. Carson has put it, John means **the world in its badness, not in its bigness.** *The world* represents hostility against God in every society and in every heart, rooted in the sinful rebellion of mankind, all under the sway and scepter of Satan, the

prince of this world. And the world was at its worst, and its most typical, when it condemned and killed Jesus.

Illus.: Have you seen this b&w photo showing a sea of people arms stiffly outstretched, saluting Hitler. And then you see one guy among all those people whose arms are crossed. Being a Christian in this world is like that.

At literally every point, the values of God are absolutely opposed to the values of the world. **Leo Tolstoy** put it this way: *“The Christian ideal changed and reversed everything so that, as the gospel puts it, ‘That which was exalted among men has become an abomination in the sight of God.’ The ideal is no longer the greatness of Pharaoh or of a Roman emperor, nor the beauty of a Greek nor the wealth of Phoenicia, but humility, purity, compassion, love. The hero is no longer [the rich man] Dives, but Lazarus the beggar; not Mary Magdalene in the day of her beauty, but the day of her repentance; not those who acquire wealth, but those who have abandoned it; not those who dwell in palaces, but those who dwell in catacombs and huts; not those who rule over others, but those who acknowledge no authority but God’s.”* [#810, What Is Art?] That is why the world hates Jesus and hates us. So Jesus tells us what we can expect from the world:

- B. The world hates Jesus (vv.18-21). Jesus says in **v.21**...Since the world, for all its religion, doesn’t know God it can’t recognize Jesus as the Son of God. In fact, **Jesus is everything they don’t want in a god**. Jesus said in **Jn 7:6**, the world *“hates me because I testify that what it does is evil.”* The world hates Jesus because he shines **light** on its shady and seedy schemes, because he is **salt** on its decay, because he **subverts** the system of power, but most of all because he brings **glory** to God, and the world will

never share its glory What's more, Jesus **rescues** the world's people, bringing light and life to those who fall in love with him.

- C. Since the world hates Jesus it will inevitably hate Jesus' disciples. Listen again to v.19....There's the problem: **we don't belong here any longer.** *Illus.:* Reminds me of an old *Far Side* cartoon that shows two bears standing up against a wall on a busy street corner, while passerby look at them. The one bear says to the other, "*Well, we're lost... And it's probably just a matter of time before someone decides to shoot us.*" [#2665] We just don't fit in this world's system any more.

The world around us loves to tout its open-mindedness but the underlying system of this world has no tolerance at all for the love of Christ. *Illus.:* In Shakespeare's *Othello* the villain Iago says of the good Cassio, "*He hath a daily beauty in his life that makes me ugly.*" Christians sing, "*May the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,*" but that will not always win us friends. **William Temple** wrote, "*The world... would not hate angels for being angelic; but it does hate men for being Christians. It grudges them their new character; it is tormented by their peace; it is infuriated by their joy.*" [in K. Hughes, p.372] You may not face outright hostility to your faith but, make no mistake, your devotion to Jesus Christ will always be at odds with this world, and we should never be surprised by hostility.

There is good news in the midst of the bad. V.20b... Despite the world's inborn resistance to God's good news there are some who listen to the witness of Christians. *We did!* Often sharing our faith in word and action is not welcome but there are some. God sees to that! There is a

deep attraction to those who are alive and fruitful with Christ's life. So we remain in Christ and bear fruit.

- D. In hating Jesus, the world is guilty of the worst kind of sin (vv.22-25). These verses don't mean that if Jesus hadn't come the world would be off the hook with God. It means that when Jesus came **the world sinned in two profound new ways**: (1) they refused to listen to God even when he came to speak his truth to them *in person*, and (2) they refused to recognize Jesus as God even when he did miracles *only God could do*.
- E. None of this makes sense, of course. To reject *God!*? How stupid! To reject a Savior? How insane! To kill the best man who ever lived? Crazy! That's the point of v.25... The world's hate for Jesus is irrational. Here Jesus takes as his own the words of his forefather, King David, "*that hated me without reason.*" The world is at its most irrational, most insanely stubborn, when it hates Christ and those who love him. **These hate crimes against Christ are moral and spiritual insanity.**

The irony of that, of course, is how desperately the hateful try to employ reason. *Illus.*: The famous atheist, **Christopher Hitchens**, author of *God is Not Great: How Religions Poison Everything*, wrote in an online debate with theologian Douglas Wilson, "*Many of the teachings of Christianity are, as well as being incredible and mythical, immoral. I would principally wish to cite the concept of vicarious redemption, whereby one's own responsibilities can be flung onto a scapegoat and thereby taken away. In my book, I argue that I can pay your debt or even take your place in prison, but I cannot absolve you of what you actually did. This exorbitant fantasy of 'forgiveness' is unfortunately matched by an equally extreme admonition—*

which is that the refusal to accept such a sublime offer may be punishable by eternal damnation.” [CT] That is “the world” speaking. **1 Cor 1:18** says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” In the face of such hatred, “how shall we then live?” A line from an old gospel song is a good answer:

II. STAND UP, STAND UP FOR JESUS (15:26-16:4)

Jesus has just said, “*They hated me without reason.*” So how does he respond to that hatred? **Vv.26-27...**

- A. Jesus responds to the world’s senseless hatred by sending his two witnesses into the world—his Spirit and his Body, the church. This is a kind of second incarnation—God in man—Christ in his church, taking on the hate of this world.

The Holy Spirit is to us our Counselor and Advocate as we face the hostile world. The Spirit of truth keeps us pointed, compass-like, toward what is true and what matters as we maneuver through this dark world. Furthermore, he gives our testimony about Christ a supernatural credibility in the world.

- B. The truly counterintuitive thing about our testimony to the world—the Spirit and the church together—is not when we condemn sin but when we declare God’s grace in Christ. The world doesn’t want accountability but the world hates grace, and Satan arrays all his efforts to stop this most glorious of God’s gifts. As revolted as we are by the sin of the world we focus, not so much on the judgment of God as the salvation he offers.

Illus.: In Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* there is a little gem of a story called “The Grand Inquisitor.” It is a kind of fable about Jesus reappearing during the time of

the Spanish Inquisition and being hauled up on charges before the Grand Inquisitor. He is Satan, and the world, and the dead church, all in one. He proceeds to tempt Jesus with the same three temptations the devil used against Christ in the wilderness. He argues and bullies and mocks. But throughout the whole exchange, Jesus remains silent. Finally, this is what happens:

“When the Inquisitor ceased speaking he waited some time for his Prisoner to answer him. His silence weighed down upon him. He saw the Prisoner had listened intently all the time, looking gently in his face an evidently not wishing to reply. The old man longed for Him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But He suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him on his bloodless aged lips. That was all his answer. The old man shuddered. His lips moved. He went to the door, opened it, and said to Him: ‘Go, and come no more... Come not at all, never, never!’ And he let Him out into the dark alleys of the town. The Prisoner went away.”

“And the old man?” [asked the listener].

“The kiss glows in his heart, but the old man adheres to his idea.”

That is Jesus in the world. Meeting all its hatred with a kiss. *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”* And that is the way we meet the world, with the kiss of the gospel.

C. But there is a warning for us as Jesus' disciples too:
vv.16:1-4... The greatest danger we believers face in this hateful world is not their persecution but our own falling away. People "fall away" when the world gets to them. When they nurse the values or philosophies of this world; when they become comfortable in the world's darkness.

Do you ever wonder if you might fall away from Jesus? Jesus told his disciples how to prepare for the dangers of this dark world. Draw our life from him, like a branch from a vine. Then we bear fruit instead of becoming kindling. Obey his commands, most notably, "*Love one another.*" And expect the world to hate what we believe and the Lord whom we love.

Conclusion

Christians, we do not belong to this world. What's more, we are called to bear fruit in this hostile environment, and we shall. Late in his life, John wrote these words in his letter we call 1 John: "*You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*"

Illus.: In the 3rd century, **Cyprian**, bishop of the church in Carthage, wrote these words in a letter to a friend: "*If I could ascend some high mountain and look out over this wide land, you know very well what I would see. Robbers on the high roads, pirates on the seas, in the amphitheaters men murdered to please applauding crowds, selfishness and cruelty, misery and despair under all roofs. It is a bad world—an incredibly bad world. But in the midst of it, I have found a quiet and a holy people who have learned a great secret. They are the despised and persecuted, but they care not. They have overcome the world. These people are called Christians, and I am one of them.*" [#415]