

WHEN THEY HATE YOU A SERMON ON JOHN 15:18-16:16

by Rev. Russell B. Smith

A friend of mine had a great t-shirt — on the front it says “You’re always a winner in your mother’s eyes.” On the back it says, “I’m not your mother!”

I was blessed to have parents that always saw me as a winner. Mom and dad repeatedly told me that I could do anything I wanted to do. They lavished me with their love, especially when things were tough. I remember being picked on by the school bullies when I was a child. I didn’t hid in shame — I would run home crying to mom and dad. They were security incarnate. Mom told me not to worry about “those bad little boys”, and dad gave me advice on how to defend myself. Whenever things were tough, I always knew that I would be secure with mom and dad — they would remind me where I stood in their eyes, and I took great comfort in that. When things got tough I always knew that I was a winner in my mother’s ... and my father’s ... eyes.

As we’ve been working through Jesus’ farewell conversation, we come across a reminder that when things get difficult, we are still winners in our Father’s eyes. Over the past few weeks, we’ve seen the truth that Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life. We’ve seen that we’re not left alone, because Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to live within us. And we’ve seen that the Holy Spirit within helps us live a fruitful life — a life of meaning and purpose. This week, Jesus reminds us that there will be bullies — there will be people who don’t like us just because of who we are as Christians. We see some of these folks very prominent in the public eye — for instance, media mogul Ted Turner, who called Christians “dumdums.” Last year, I saw the popular TV show *The Family Guy*, known for its satirical wit. The main character was in a hotel room with his family, and he opened the drawer. Finding a Bible, he mockingly danced around singing, “Look I’m a Christian, I’m a Christian.” Some feel disdain it more directly, for instance, when they don’t get drunk at happy hour with the gang from work. Some of us feel the condescension that comes when we take stands for absolute truth and morality. Behind the tolerant veneer of much of our enlightened society there simmers a dislike of those who stand for moral absolutes and the God who is there. But when they hate us, and they will, Jesus reminds that we still have the Holy Spirit. When their hatred frightens us enough to become like them, we are reminded that we have the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit sustains us. All that having been said, let’s dig into the text.

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. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is 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. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.

Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.

When the world hates you, the Holy Spirit sustains you through *truth*. Look at verse 26. The Spirit is the spirit of truth that testifies. Again down to 16:13 — He will guide you into all truth. How does he do this? First and foremost, he does it through the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17). There are other ways the Holy Spirit communicates truth — through inner conviction, sudden insight (illumination), inspirational words of others — just to name a few. However those methods are secondary and only serve to apply the truths of Scripture in a particular context. Scripture is the primary and normal way the Spirit conveys truth. What is the truth that will sustain us through persecution? That because you trust in Christ the King, you are now a citizen of the kingdom. And the Spirit makes sure nothing will change your status with the King. But what happens when we stop being sure of God's love and affection for us?

Things could have been different. Her father and mother divorced when she was a child. Her father started dating again, and soon married a second time, at which point she and her brother went to live with him. Her father spent more time indulging his interests than in building relationships with his children. She became the forgotten child after a new sister was born. Starved for attention and somewhat shy by disposition, she endured high school. Then she met a boy who lavished attention on her. She gave herself to him totally, and soon she was pregnant. They moved in together, and things started to go wrong. They were always yelling at each other, he was spending the money that she earned at her part-time job on fishing trips. He had seemed to give so much in return for her love, and now she was miserable and had nothing left to give.

I wonder how things would have been different if she had been secure in her father's love? If she had felt the deep seated confidence that comes from a deep unconditional love? She needed her mother's love to teach her what it meant to be a woman and she needed her father's love to teach her what to look for in a man. Without that father's love, she had a gaping hole of emptiness that left her open to the first guy who came along and showed her attention. Without that father's love, she was an orphan by default.

The Holy Spirit is the reminder of the truth that we are not orphans. We are not left alone. When we suffer the disdain of those around us because we act differently; when they whisper about us; when they intentionally isolate us — the Holy Spirit reminds us that we are a winner in our Father's eyes. No matter what they say, no matter what they do, they can't take away our standing before the Father.

When they hate you, the Holy Spirit sustains you through the truth, but he also sustains you through *conviction*. What does conviction mean? In this context, it means to expose — to bring truth to light. Look at 16:8-11 (When he comes, he will convict...). There are three main points around which the Holy Spirit brings conviction: Sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Conviction reveals sin. Sin is doing things that God forbids, or avoiding things that God wants us to do. I John 1:8-10 makes it clear: Every one of us breaks God's law, and if we claim not to, then we're deceiving ourselves.

Conviction also concerns righteousness. Righteousness is about having a clean standing before God — no black marks on the record. The Holy Spirit teaches us how this righteousness is achieved — not through anything we do, but simply through God's lavished grace. Romans 3:21-23 says that the world likes to think that there's something they can do to earn righteousness. But there isn't — it's given simply through faith (which means love, trust and knowledge). Jesus goes to the Father to establish righteousness for those who believe in him.

Conviction also brings about judgment. There will be a final accounting for those who are loyal to Christ and those who shake their fist in his face. The biblical view is that there are only these two groups. According to John, the judgment has already been pronounced.

How does conviction help us in our times of trouble? It helps us to stay humble. Conviction about sin reminds us that we are not that far from being the persecutors rather than the persecuted. We have the capacity within our own hearts to hate others. There's quite a historical record of the visible church authorities abusing their power — that doesn't invalidate the truth of Christ — it simply illustrates the truth that we are all, especially those of us in the church, lawbreakers, in need of grace.

Conviction about righteousness reminds us that we didn't earn our standing with the Father — he gave it to us out of his own goodwill. It comes only because of the work of Christ, not our own works. And this ties in closely with judgment. Because of Christ's works, we won't be judged. Christ has already taken the judgment upon himself. Conviction about these things frees us up to live the positive life of love to which we are called.

So, when they hate you, the Holy Spirit sustains you through truth, through conviction, and lastly, through *glorification*. Look at verse 16:14 (He will bring glory to me...). Glory is one of those words that we don't use very much in our culture — it has lost its impact. A few years back I went to a Rolling Stones concert in Williams-Bryce stadium in Columbia, SC. Imagine the stadium packed with about 60,000 of my favorite strangers. Imagine us tingling with anticipation

as the opening band finished up. After several minutes of silence of the opening bands being cleared away, twilight settled in. We heard the first few chords of the opening song. Then lights from all over the stadium focused onto a single point on the stage, where Mick Jagger strutted out to the brilliant lights and the deafening cheers of the crowd. That is glory.

Or how about the feeling of electricity as the last few seconds of the NCAA Championship game tick down, and thousands of fans rush the court screaming to celebrate their team's victory. That's glory. Paavo Jarvi, after he has finished a brilliant performance, turning around in the spotlight to take his bows — that is glory.

Glory is splendor — it's that thing that makes us clap or cheer or gape in awe. Christ's glory makes all those others look like a bunch of kindergartners putting on a pageant. How does the Holy Spirit reveal Christ's glory? Through knowledge — notice the close connection of knowledge to Glory? As we come to know Christ all the more, the more we recognize the glory that surrounds us. The Holy Spirit opens us up to Christ's glory here in worship. Some may come and see nothing but a guy in a dress prancing about making high-sounding statements. But those who have the Holy Spirit can perceive that we are in God's throne room, and the King is here watching us do worship.

This is where our Charismatic friends really have one up on us. While we may not agree totally with their practices in worship, they certainly have a developed sense of God's glory. Most Presbyterians treat worship like a mildly interesting college lecture — most neo-Pentecostals treat worship like an event where they expect to be wowed by God's awesome power. They are ready to see Christ glorified — and the Holy Spirit is behind every desire to see the splendor of Jesus.

My friends Yaqub and Khadra Mohammed both come from East Africa. Both were raised as Muslims, and they converted to Christianity. Both have paid a high price. Shunned by their families and hounded by people in their communities, they hold on to their faith. The people in her own village stoned — yes *stoned*, Khadra. When they claimed the name of Jesus Christ, Yaqub and Khadra lost their families, lost their livelihoods, and their mortal lives were in danger. Thankfully, they made it to the United States where they are relatively safe. Who was it that sustained them under such pressure — the Holy Spirit. He reminded them of the truth, convicted them, and gave them a vision of God's glory. If he sustained them, will he not also sustain you? You think about that. Amen.