

John 15:18-27: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] John chapter 15 verses 18 to 27. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own.

But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 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 also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin.

But now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin.

But now they have seen and hated both me and my father. But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled. They hated me without a cause. But when the helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

[1 : 0 8] And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. In the concluding verses of John chapter 15, Jesus teaches his disciples to expect to be hated and persecuted by the world, as he was.

Indeed, this is presented as a sort of encouragement. We are counted worthy to be persecuted for his name's sake. This isn't a teaching that is exclusive to John's gospel. We see a similar thing in Matthew chapter 10, for instance, as Jesus sends out the twelve among the cities and towns of Israel.

But it is something that is emphasised here at a very important point. Jesus is teaching that suffering and struggling together is one of the means by which our union with Christ is known. We might perhaps think of the experience of warfare, where through struggle and suffering together a band of brothers can be formed.

And to be chosen by Christ is to be chosen to suffer with and for him. We might think of the example of Saul of Tarsus, who's told how much he must suffer for Christ's name's sake. The bond between us and Jesus, then, is a bond of blood and shared suffering.

If Jesus abides in us, we will be hated by the world just as our master was. The coming of Jesus heightens the culpability of the world. What formerly could have been excused by ignorance now becomes high-handed and willful sin.

[2 : 2 4] How we respond to the light of Jesus, then, is a matter of decisive importance. Do we shrink away from the light back into the deeds of darkness? Or do we walk out into the exposure of the light, seeking forgiveness for our sins?

Jesus is the one in whom is light. He is the one who brings light into the world. And also, he is the one who creates a people who will bear that light out into the world. The presence of that light is something that is a threat to the world.

As long as the light is there, the deeds of darkness are exposed by it. They cannot be obscured. They can't be rationalised in the same way. They're seen for what they are. Consequently, the darkness will hate the light.

It will seek to expel the light. As long as the light is present, the darkness will be fiercely opposed to it. Where there is no light, it is easy to delude ourselves and to rationalise our actions.

The light strips us of this possibility. Jesus goes further. He argues that the hatred that's directed against him is a fulfilment of their law. There is clearly an irony here.

[3 : 25] They are holding on to the law, but yet even that law testifies to Jesus. Jesus clearly teaches the authority of the law, and in fact emphasises it at this point in others like it, where the law is seen to point towards the full reality of his mission.

Indeed, the implicit claim that Jesus is making at this point is a startling one. He is fulfilling the words of the Psalms, and the words of the Psalms being referred to in other places is like Psalm 69 verse 4.

More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause. Mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. While these are words that are originally used by David, Jesus is saying that he is the one that's going to fulfil them.

Jesus' voice is to be heard within the Psalms. These Psalms speak of him. He is the true Messiah, the true son of David. The words of the king in the Psalms are the words of David, but they're ultimately the words of the greater David.

It's noteworthy that we find the words of the Psalms on Jesus' lips at many points in his ministry, perhaps particularly at critical junctures such as that of the cross. At the Last Supper, Jesus also declares that he who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me, quoting Psalm 41 verse 9.

[4 : 36] Those words in Psalm 41 verse 9 are about David and his experience, but yet Jesus can take these words as being prophetic words about his own experience. Here I think we see something of the basis for typology.

We see in the Old Testament things that anticipate prophetically the events in Jesus' ministry. There's a sense that it must be the case that the ministry of the Messiah will take the form of David's life, that will play out Davidic patterns, and that the greater son of David will be like his father.

All of this provides some of the basis for the way that the early church regarded the Psalms. In Colossians chapter 3 verse 16, we read, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

The word of Christ dwells in us richly as we sing psalms, and that connection is one that derives its strength in large part from the way that the psalms are taken up as Jesus' first person speech within the Gospels.

The Spirit will come, and the Spirit will be sent by Jesus from the Father. The Spirit proceeds from the Father. There is an implicit Trinitarianism in John's Gospel, more generally, but it comes to the fore in places like this.

[5 : 48] We should note that each person of the Trinity is mentioned here, Father, Son, and Spirit, but also the different ways that the Spirit is spoken of as coming. The Spirit comes.

There is a sense in which this is described as the Spirit's own action. The Spirit is sent by Jesus. The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, and so the Spirit's action is related to the action of Christ.

And then the Spirit proceeds from the Father, relating the Spirit to the Father. Here, then, we have the indications of a rich Trinitarian doctrine that's only just beneath the surface of the text.

The more you look into it, the more that you are invited to reflect upon a deep mystery, the relationship between Jesus, the Son, and the Father, that the one who has seen the Son has seen the Father. Also the fact that the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son.

The Spirit is the means by which Jesus will be present to his people. And that close connection between the Spirit and the Son cannot be understood fully without venturing into some of the reflections and meditations upon the doctrine of the Trinity that occupied later theologians.

[6 : 51] The Spirit will bear witness to the Son and will assist the Twelve in their own witness-bearing. The Church itself is included within this witness-bearing. Witness-bearing, of course, is a key theme all the way through the Gospel of John.

The ministry of the Apostolic Church is the principal means by which the Spirit bears his witness to Christ. The Spirit will be given to the Church and as they receive the Spirit, they will bear witness in that Spirit.

A question to consider. How do we see the hatred of the world playing a revelatory purpose within the narrative of the Gospel of John?