

Rev Rory Stott - The Assault on our Peace

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Well, can we turn again to the passage in John's Gospel and John 15? And in verse 18 he says to his disciples, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

Well, we're very much living in an age of change on tweet.

Every aspect of our lives is really about change. Think about technological advancement. The young people are well more clued up than we are.

Everything is changing in the lives in which we live. There is this advancement in so many different ways. But also as humans, we are those who go through change.

It is a natural part of our lives. It is a natural part of our existence that we're going through change all the time. We're getting older. We go through different seasons.

[1 : 08] We are impacted in different ways by the change in our lives, at what is referred to in the Lion King. As the circle of life, we live in the sense in which everything is changing and we live in the circle of life.

Things change. Things come. Things go. And our lives change. That is just the nature of our lives. The life of the Christian is no different in a slightly different sense.

The life of the Christian is no different in that we are those who are maturing.

I hope that we're maturing. The life of the Christian is a life of change. We are those who should be maturing. We should be growing in grace. We should be growing into the likeness of Jesus with the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

So as Christians, our lives are to be those lives that are changing and maturing and changing into the likeness of Christ.

[2 : 11] Spiritual maturity is an imperative. Spiritual maturity is very much a part of who we are as human beings.

Jesus warns that not only internal change is going to take place because, yeah, in John's Gospel, he talks about internal change. Remember that wonderful conversation that he has with Nicodemus, and he says, you must be born again.

There must be something that goes on inside of you that is a work of God. It's not anything that you can do for yourself. It's something that takes place outside of you and God looking on, justifying you.

But then an internal change takes place because of the work of God in your life. So there is this internal change that takes place, but also here Jesus warns his disciples and his followers that there will be pressure from out with them.

There will be this in terms of this change under this idea of change, there will be pressure and opposition that they will face from out with who they are, from those who won't like them because of who they are in followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3 : 23] And that's what we're going to be thinking about this afternoon, this afternoon. This opposition that is faced by the disciples. And we're going to notice four things about this. We notice first of all the precedent of that opposition.

Jesus says in verse 18, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. And someone who goes before us in that sense, that has been a hated because of who he is.

And that is the Lord Jesus Christ. The precedent of this opposition. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

And Jesus says to us, there's a good chance that you will be disliked because of me. There is a good chance that you will face this opposition in your own life because of me.

And I was hated first before you were hated. And of course we see that supremely on the cross, don't we? As we come to the communion, we think about the cross of Christ.

[4 : 26] We think about the road that Jesus took to the cross. The opposition, the hatred by his own people, by those who were said to be part of his own racial group, they hated him.

He faced that opposition supremely on the cross and they strung him up on the cross. There supremely we see that he was hated. Notice in the context of him saying that you will face persecution, you will be hated and I was hated before you were hated.

Notice he affirms them. In that context, in verse 19, he says, 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.

And we could easily read over that and not catch what Jesus is saying there. He affirms them and who they are as believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You are children of God. I chose you, he says. I chose you. You didn't do anything to merit your fellowship in the family of God.

[5 : 39] You did absolutely nothing, but I chose you. And it's almost like a teacher encouraging the pupils here. He encourages them. He says, I chose you.

You are mine. You will face hatred, you will face opposition in this world, but you are mine. Be encouraged. Be encouraged because you are mine and nobody can take what you have as a child of God and who you are as a child of God.

Nobody can take that away from you. The doctrine of election is really, really important for us as disciples of Jesus.

The Belgian Confession says about the doctrine of election. It says this, all children of Adam are equally affected by the fall and enter into perdition.

That's eternal damnation. They enter into perdition and ruin, yet God showed himself to be merciful and just.

[6 : 41] Merciful by withdrawing and saving from perdition. Those who from eternity passed, he chose in Jesus by grace, not because of works.

He is just in leaving the others in their ruin and fall into which they plunged themselves. Isn't it true, dear friends, that we very quick to blame God sometimes?

I remember being at a Christianity Explored course and I was at the table with a lady who just couldn't get hell. She, I can't take hell. I can't believe in hell.

Yes, I can believe in a loving Jesus Christ. I can believe in a God who loves me. But how can you, how can you bring these things, these two things together? A loving God and a hell and she just couldn't get that.

And isn't it true that many of us are very quick to blame God? How dare you send people to hell? How dare you send them to that place where there will be a gnashing of teeth as the Bible tells us, where there will be fire, that place, that isn't a nice place to go to.

[7 : 49] How do we bring these two things together and we blame God, don't we? We blame them. How dare you, how dare you be loving and at the same time you can send people to hell and yet the Bible tells us that hell is true.

But we blame God and we also forget and what we've seen here by this confession is that the blame is ours. The blame is humanity's.

It's nothing to do really with God. He is holy. The blame is ours, however. We cannot blame God for sending people to hell.

There are consequences for our rebellion against God. There are consequences for this rebellious nature.

We're born with this natural inclination to reject God, to do our own thing, the idea of autonomy, self-rule. That is our natural inclination and the Bible tells us that there are consequences to our sinfulness and that is hell.

[9 : 00] There's no easy way of putting that. It is hell. So there are the consequences of our rebellion. Yet there is mercy here.

There is mercy towards the disciples and there is mercy towards Christians. He says to these disciples, he says to his followers, I have chosen you because I have loved you from eternity past. I have chosen you again not because of your own merit, not because of who you are, but because of my love for you. I have chosen you because of my grace. I have chosen you.

And so in the middle of saying, it's not going to be easy for you. At the same time as saying, you will be hated, you will be reviled, he says, I have chosen you.

There's a sense in which he's saying to his disciples, take heart. Take heart.

[10:03] So Jesus says, remember the world hated you, hated me before it hated you. Now, there's a sense in which we don't really get the persecution that Jesus might be talking about here.

We live in Scotland. There's a sense in which we don't really get persecution. The idea of the New Testament, the theme of persecution where people have been martyred for their love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we have that today, don't we? Christians in Iran will know something of what Jesus is talking about here. Christians in China, some of them anyway, will know something of the persecution that he's been talking about here.

So in that sense, we don't really get what Jesus is talking about here. Although the persecution is getting louder and louder, increasingly Christians are being marginalised, aren't we, with the laws that have been passed and the things that people are increasingly beginning to say about Christians, the lack of toleration with regards to Christianity and yet not with things like Islam and homosexuality and all that.

Increasingly yes, there is a louder and louder voice against Christians. So in that sense, yes, we get something of that idea of persecution.

[11:25] There's also, there's another sense in which we should feel persecuted as Christians.

We should experience persecution. Because here, here it is dear friends, if we never feel, if we never cause discomfort to other people or prick other people's consciences, whether it's people in our family or whether it's people in the workplace, if other people never feel uncomfortable by the things that we say, I think there's maybe something wrong with our obedience and our walk with God.

Isn't it true that we like to be liked? We like other people to like us. And if other people are never uncomfortable in any sense of that word around us, then surely there's something wrong with our walk with the Lord.

If everyone sees us as nice people, then we have nothing to offer them in terms of the gospel, dear friends, because the gospel inherently, it is something that makes us feel uncomfortable.

The gospel is something that should make us squirm a little bit in our seats because it's challenging, it challenges our natural sinful inclination. The gospel challenges us, the cross challenges us, it causes us discomfort and it should do so.

[13:02] And that applies to us in our Christian relationships as well. It applies to our relationship with non-believers. And it applies to the preacher as well.

I'm somebody who likes to be liked. But if people who are under my preaching are not squirming at times and there's something wrong with my preaching, because the gospel, the truth, inherently, it makes us squirm.

And we should feel uncomfortable at times. With our sin, with our walk with the Lord, we need to be challenged.

I wonder about this afternoon, are we people-pleasers?

Is that what we're known for? We simply please people. That doesn't mean that we don't help people. It doesn't mean that we're not there for people who are in need. It doesn't mean that we don't give of ourselves and we serve other people as Christians.

[14:11] But it also means that we can't always be nice to people. Out of love we need to share the truth of God with them.

The precedent of this persecution we see in Jesus, but also we see the reason for this persecution. The reason—and we see a couple of things. The first thing that we notice is in verse 19.

If the world hates you, sorry, 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. Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world therefore the world hates you. The world hates you because I chose you very simply. The world hates you because you are my follower.

But secondly, we notice as well in verse 21, another reason for this persecution. They will treat you this way, because of, or on account of, my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

[15:22] That is why they will persecute you, because they do not know the one who sent me. So whether they obey you or reject you, they do this because of me.

There's a sense in which Jesus is saying, don't take it personally if you do face persecution. They do this because of who I am. They hate me. Don't take it personally, he says.

Those who reject me is also through ignorance of who God is. They don't know God. They don't know the sovereignty and the holiness of God. And so yet we need to just understand about many of the Jewish people that Jesus was talking to and talking about at this time.

Many of Jesus's opponents were claiming that they were the true worshipers of God. And it's really important that we just understand this.

Many of the Jews were saying, we worship the true God. We worship the one and only true God. And because of their faithfulness to God, notice Jesus' words, he who hates me, hates my father as well.

[16:37] They could not claim to love God while hating Jesus. If you hate me, Jesus is saying to them, you hate God as well.

I'm the second person of the Trinity. You hate me, you hate God as well. They could not claim to love God while hating Jesus at the same time.

They couldn't claim that. He is challenging that mindset. You hate me, you hate God as well. And that's incredible. And he's saying, I am God.

I am the living God. You hate me and you hate God. Those who hate Jesus hate the father as well because Jesus and the father are one.

How can we apply that? You know, similarly, we can't call ourselves Christians. Yet deny all the Jesus stuff. I've spoken to people who will say, yeah, I'm a Christian.

[17:34] I go to church. I give to the church. I'm a good person. But don't talk to me too much about the Jesus stuff. That's a little bit too heavy for me.

And here Jesus says, you can't do that. It's either all or nothing. It's either all of Jesus or it's nothing of Jesus. That's the implication here. So Jesus, he gives the reasons for their persecution.

What does all this mean as believers, as Christians? What does this mean for us today? Well, the implication is that persecution will not be because of what Christians do wrong but because of what we do right.

That's the implication. Any persecution that we experience from other people will be because of what we do right. Not because of the things that we do wrong.

And let me just apply that just for a moment. Think of young people who are at school or who are at university. Young people, if you use filthy language, if you swear, then you will be part of the in-group.

[18:52] You will be part of the in-group. You will belong. Use filthy language, you swear. You'll be the in-crowd. You'll be the guy. You'll be the woman.

Yeah, I'm part of the crowd. And yet if you tell someone that Jesus is the only way of salvation, then you're weird.

Then you're strange. So that's society in which we live. Jesus is the only way. Jesus is the only way in which we might have a relationship with God.

Weird, you're intolerant. What's wrong with you? Have you heard about what that person said? He believes in Jesus. He says that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Yeah, right. I can do whatever I want to really. And there are multiple ways to Jesus. I can follow Muhammad. I can practice New Age.

[19:46] I can do anything. And the minute you say Jesus is the only way to the Father, then you're weird and then you're strange. So dear friends, there, there you have to a large extent the persecution that we do face today.

And the day in which we live. Let's notice the justice. There is justice against this persecution versus 22 to 24. Jesus says, 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. Jesus says there are a few things, a few reasons why these people are guilty.

The first reason that they're guilty is for rejecting his teaching. Rejecting his teaching in verse 22.

[20:57] If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin. They're guilty because they have rejected his teaching. Hebrews 4.7 says, today if you share his voice, do

not harden your hearts.

Do not harden your hearts when you share the voice and the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. The implication is that we cannot remain indifferent to the gospel.

We either choose Jesus or we reject him. We either say I am for Jesus or we have to say I am not for Jesus.

There is no gray area there. We are either for Jesus and we stand for Jesus. We live our lives in a way that would glorify Jesus. Or we do not.

There is no gray area there. It also applies to accepting some of his teaching and rejecting some of his teaching.

[22 : 03] You get little sweets like jelly beans and I love jelly beans. And the thing is that I like some of the colors because they taste differently. I don't like the black ones.

The red ones are absolutely delicious. Friends, sometimes we can take the Bible like that and say I like the parts of the Bible. I love Jesus because he's loving but I'm gonna reject and leave other parts of the Bible would talk about hell and talk about damnation and these types of things.

And we can't do that. We have to take the whole counsel of God and accept the word of God as the word of God.

They are guilty for their rejection of the teaching of Jesus. They're also guilty because of their hatred of God.

Notice this verse 23. Whoever hates me, hates my father also. They're guilty because they have rejected God and they hate him. And the sort of the law if you like that goes against us.

[23 : 11] Jesus says in Matthew 22, Jesus replied, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.

They're guilty of rejecting his teaching. They're guilty of their hatred for God. There are times when we grapple with parts of the Bible.

There are times when we have major questions about aspects of the Bible. There are times when we wrestle with God because of the different providences that we have experienced as the children of God.

These all are legitimate aspects of being believers of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are imperfect. We are those who will struggle. We are those who will go through difficult times as the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 20] And there is nothing wrong with these things. There is nothing wrong with these things. But at the same time, with all these uncertainties, if there are uncertainties at the same time, we come as Thomas did and we bow the knee before Jesus.

My Lord and my God, and we worship him and we trust him and we have faith in him as our Lord and our Savior. So these other people are guilty of rejecting his teaching.

They're guilty of their hatred of God and him. And thirdly, they have seen his miracles in verse 24. 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. Jesus has come to do the works that his father had given him to do.

He has performed these miracles. He has healed people. He has done all these miracles. And he is saying, those people who have seen me perform these miracles and who are still and who have rejected me, they are guilty before my father and guilty before me.

[25 : 49] They've seen all these miracles and yet they have still rejected God. These miracles were the works the father had given him today. And what about today?

Today we might not see the miracles that were seen in Jesus' day yet the evidence is still there that God exists. So those who God has revealed himself to, Jesus is saying here, are without excuse, non-believing Jews stand condemned by the very law in which they glory.

He says, you've seen me, you've experienced me, you've seen the miracles that I performed, you've heard my teaching, I have shown you and told you about the path of salvation and the path to the father and yet many people have still rejected me.

They have rejected me and so they are guilty. The two implications to this, as we think about this, the justice that Jesus is talking about here, the two implications.

The first one is the priority and the urgency of the gospel in our day and age. There is a priority about telling people about the Lord Jesus Christ, of living our lives as a testimony to who Jesus is and those who actually tell people about Jesus and to use an illustration of a good friend of mine.

[27 : 22] It's a little bit like if you go to triage, you go to A and E and you say to them, I've got a sore finger, there's a little cut in, there's a little bit of blood coming out my finger, I need help, you're gonna wait there for hours.

But if you go to triage and you say, I've got a hot palpitations, I've got a sore chest and my arms are tingling, they're gonna see you straight away and you're gonna go straight in there.

And the gospel is the same. There is a great urgency to tell people about Jesus. There is an urgency to tell them in the light of this justice that Jesus is talking about here.

He says these people are guilty, they have heard about me, they have heard the gospel, they have been told the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ and yet they still reject me.

Dear friends, the priority of the gospel and the urgency that there is to tell people about the Lord. But there's another implication here and that is this.

[28 : 29] If you have heard the gospel and remained indifferent to it, you are guilty before God.

You are guilty before God. And how many people in our communities, how many people have been to that Sunday night fellowship and they've heard the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and they have chosen to reject him.

I will wait, I've still a lifetime to live, I've so many good things to still do. In my life I'm going to wait until my death bed and there I will choose him.

Dear friends, we don't know what's gonna happen tomorrow. We don't know how our journey is going to go and we go from Bolivia, we go home.

We have no idea what's gonna happen tomorrow or tomorrow is going to bring and what the next day is going to bring. There is this urgency to turn to God and to embrace him as our Lord and as our savior.

[29 : 38] And yet, as we think about this justice, today is a new day, isn't it? Today is a new day for Christians as well.

And perhaps we've come here this afternoon and we are, there's a sense of guilt because of some of the things that we've been saying, because of our lifestyles, because of some of the things that we've been doing.

And the wonderful thing about the message of the gospel is that today is a new day. Jesus uses those words in Revelation 3, he says, here I am, I stand at the door and I knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me. And dear friends, if there's anything that we take away with us today, may it be this that we answer that knock of Jesus on our door today, whether we mature Christians or we're unbelievers or whether we were just been born again or just converted, whatever our status, whatever our position with God.

May this be a challenge for us. Elsewhere in the Bible we're told to examine ourselves before we come to the table. May this be something that we take away with us this afternoon, that we examine ourselves, we examine our lives, we examine our relationships.

[31 : 00] Behold, Jesus says, I stand at the door and I knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with me and he with me.

I used to believe that the gospel was a temporary situation for that time in our lives when we're converted. I used to believe that it was a temporary situation where we heed that call, we come to God, but then we don't think about the gospel again and how wrong I was because the gospel is for now, it's for tomorrow, it's for every moment of our lives that we come and we bring all our dirt, we will bring all our brokenness that is wrong in our lives, our imperfection, and we lay it at the foot of the cross and we leave it there and we seek God's glorious forgiveness and there we are renewed, there we are strengthened, there again we are strengthened and liberated from our guilt and from all our brokenness.

I love the analogy of the church being a hospital because we are those who come in all our imperfections, we come in all our brokenness and we come because of that brokenness, not because we have it all sorted.

We bring our imperfections, recognizing our need for God and we rest and we trust in him. Notice very briefly. Fourthly, the antidote, the antidote of this opposition, this persecution that Jesus is talking about, verse 26 says this, 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, and you also will bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning.

The counselor will be with you, the counselor will support you. When you are persecuted, the counselor will help you and guide you.

[33 : 22] Notice that the work of the Holy Spirit is always to testify about Jesus. If you've ever been to Edinburgh Castle and you've been there at night, you go there at night and there's massive big beams that shine up at the castle.

It's a beautiful sight. And you go and you walk across the side of the castle and you notice the castle. You notice the glory of the castle and the magnificence of the castle.

You notice how big it is and how powerful it is. You don't look at the lights, those beams shining up at the castle. You don't look at the lamps and the lamps underneath and you think, well, that's an incredible light.

And the Holy Spirit is the same. The Holy Spirit illuminates Jesus Christ. He shines on Jesus so that he is glorified so that we see his magnificence, that we see his wonder, and so that we're all struck by who Jesus is and by what Jesus has done for us on that cross.

That is the work of the Holy Spirit. We don't say, wow, check out the lights. No, we say, wow, check at the castle. We don't say, wow, check at the Holy Spirit in his work.

[34 : 45] Although we experience his work. No, we say, check at Jesus. Look at Jesus, he's magnificent. He is awesome. He is incredible.

And notice too, in verse 27, and you also will bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning.

We see here the unique witness bearing function of the apostles. Although they had a unique role to bear witness to Jesus, so Christians have an important role to play in bearing witness to Jesus and being letters written by Jesus to the world.

Ever thought and heard about that expression? We are letters written by the Lord Jesus Christ that our family members who are not believers, that our work colleagues who are not believers would see something of Jesus Christ in our lives.

He writes those letters and they go out and they sense throughout the world and he uses us to bear witness to Jesus. The great evangelist Billy Graham was somebody who preached throughout the world, but he was somebody that whose name was never sullied in any way, that I know of any way.

[36 : 12] He was a man seemingly of integrity. He was a man that the world could look on and say, wow, there's something about that man that is attractive.

And I wonder dear friends, if others look at your life and say, well, there's something about that person's life that is attractive to me. Sure, they're imperfect, they speak about their imperfections, but there's something about that person that is attractive to me and I want that.

And that is what Jesus gives to us. Jesus is the one who is attractive. I wonder if other people are attracted to Jesus.

Now I wonder about your letter, what is written in your letter and what is it that the world reads in your letter? Let's pray. Father God, we thank you so much for your words.

We thank you, heavenly father, for the work of the Holy Spirit, even amongst us here, we trust and have faith in the work of the Holy Spirit, that he is moving, that he is illuminating, that he is shining on Jesus for us this afternoon.

[37 : 23] And we thank you for that. Continue on in our presence, we pray. And we ask it in his name. Amen.