

John Chapter 15

The parable of the vine and the branches is well known by many Christians. And, its message is clear: that Christians must remain connected to Jesus to live life to its fullest.

You would be hard pressed to find a Christian who doesn't believe this, but that doesn't mean we are all good at following Jesus' advice.

Remember that Jesus just finished telling the disciples he will be leaving them soon. One of the dangers of reading through a book of the Bible in multiple sessions broken up by chapter is that we easily forget to think about it as a single narrative. And, most of the time when this section is highlighted, it is done so in isolation from the chapter immediately before it. But, knowing the context should help us to relate to Jesus' words even better.

Jesus isn't telling the disciples to stay physically close to him. He is saying that, even in his physical absence, they are to remain spiritually and emotionally connected to him. And, that closeness will be felt if they take his teachings to heart and remember all they have learned from him.

This same message is true for us today. And, even though we all know it's important, it can be easy to forget. This can be especially true when we strive to live missionally – on mission in the world around us at all times.

We can get so caught up in connecting our lives to the lives of those outside the church that we forget why we are doing it. We can lose our focus and have our Christ-likeness fade away. That is why Jesus gives us this reminder of the importance of reading the Bible regularly, gathering with other believers, and praying regularly.

Jesus tells us that without these things we will lose focus and work toward goals that are not his, possibly goals that even seem good, but are not allowing us to join God in the work he is already doing all around us.

In Jesus we have every motivation we could ever need. It would be silly to live on mission without regularly strengthening our connection with him. So, how is your connection with the True Vine? Do you give Jesus opportunities to speak into all aspects of the mission you are on for him? Or, are there a few areas you might have stepped into on your own? If you are going forward in love, you are probably on the right track. But, don't forget to keep the paths of communication open.

Next, Jesus tells the disciples that whatever response they get from the world when they live by the words he has spoken will be because of him, not them.

But, Jesus isn't talking about the whole world here. Look at the context of this section closely. He's talking about the Jews. He's saying the religious Jews will hate them, because he has pointed out their sin. He has made them aware of the ways they are not honoring God, and they refuse to repent and change their ways.

Think about it. Who has Jesus been confronting the most during his entire earthly ministry? Pharisees! Who is the primary audience listening to his message? God's chosen people. The Jews. He has talked to Gentiles a handful of times in his travels, but he has made it clear on multiple occasions that his primary focus during his time on earth is the Jews.

Plus, notice that he refers to "their Law" which he quotes: "They hated me without cause." That phrase comes from multiple places in the Psalms. That is the Jewish Law. Not the law of the whole world. Remember, the Gentiles Jesus interacts with do not know God, and they do not adhere to what we now call the Old Testament.

So who is Jesus really warning us about here? For his disciples, it is the religious elite of First Century Judaism. They don't appreciate Jesus' message, because it forces them to rethink what they think they know about God.

Keep this in mind when you receive what you perceive to be hatred from people. Pay attention to the reason for it. Where is that hate coming from? Is it because you are bearing witness to Jesus in the same way he bore witness to the Father? In love, grace, and mercy? Are the uber-religious mad at you because you show kindness to people they consider too far gone to be saved? Are your actions causing those who follow Jesus to take a closer look at their relationship with him?

If this is the kind of action that is causing people to scorn you, then you are experiencing what Jesus warns about here. If truly living a life of love for God and love for our neighbors, like Jesus teaches us to live, brings you suffering, then these words from him can bring you comfort.

But that is not always the case. Is it possible that people who do not yet know Jesus are mad at you because you are being a jerk? Or a hypocrite?

Jesus received a lot of pushback from the religious elites. But the crowds tend to like him a lot. And, those crowds include both Jews and Gentiles. They are drawn to him. Don't forget the thousands of people who wanted to hear his message so badly that they forgot to pack a lunch. More than once!

So, who is it that hates you? Hate might sound like a harsh word here, but there is probably someone out there who gets angry at you because of the way you live out your faith. If not, then that might be something to examine as well. We should never go out of our way to try and make someone angry, but Jesus reminds us that it is unrealistic to think we can always avoid it.

So, the question we need to ask ourselves is whether we are hated by the same people who would have hated Jesus. Or are we doing something to repel those who would have welcomed Jesus' message and been drawn to him? And if our actions are causing the latter, then what can we do to fix the problem?