The World’s Attitude

John 15:18-16:4

I would like to start my sermon today, by sharing a well-known children’s story…

Once there was a tree....
and she loved a little boy.
And everyday the boy would come
and he would gather her leaves
and make them into crowns
and play king of the forest.
He would climb up her trunk
and swing from her branches
and eat apples.
And they would play hide-and-go-seek.
And when he was tired,
he would sleep in her shade.
And the boy loved the tree....
very much.
And the tree was happy.
But time went by.
And the boy grew older.
And the tree was often alone.
Then one day the boy came to the tree
and the tree said, "Come, Boy, come and
climb up my trunk and swing from my
branches and eat apples and play in my
shade and be happy."
"I am too big to climb and play" said
the boy.
"I want to buy things and have fun.
I want some money?"
"I'm sorry," said the tree, "but I
have no money.
I have only leaves and apples.
Take my apples, Boy, and sell them in
the city. Then you will have money and
you will be happy."
And so the boy climbed up the
tree and gathered her apples
and carried them away.
And the tree was happy.
But the boy stayed away for a long time....
and the tree was sad.
And then one day the boy came back
and the tree shook with joy
and she said, "Come, Boy, climb up my trunk
and swing from my branches and be happy."
"I am too busy to climb trees," said the boy.
"I want a house to keep me warm," he said.
"I want a wife and I want children,
and so I need a house.
Can you give me a house ?"
" I have no house," said the tree.
"The forest is my house,
but you may cut off
my branches and build a
house. Then you will be happy."

And so the boy cut off her branches
and carried them away
to build his house.
And the tree was happy.
But the boy stayed away for a long time.
And when he came back,
the tree was so happy
she could hardly speak.
"Come, Boy," she whispered,
"come and play."
"I am too old and sad to play,"
said the boy.
"I want a boat that will
take me far away from here.
Can you give me a boat?"
"Cut down my trunk
and make a boat," said the tree.
"Then you can sail away...
and be happy."
And so the boy cut down her trunk
and made a boat and sailed away.
And the tree was happy
... but not really.

And after a long time
the boy came back again.
"I am sorry, Boy,"
said the tree," but I have nothing
left to give you -
My apples are gone."
"My teeth are too weak
for apples," said the boy.
"My branches are gone,"
said the tree. " You
cannot swing on them - "
"I am too old to swing
on branches," said the boy.
"My trunk is gone, " said the tree.
"You cannot climb - "
"I am too tired to climb" said the boy.
"I am sorry," sighed the tree.
"I wish that I could give you something....
but I have nothing left.
I am just an old stump.
I am sorry...."
"I don't need very much now," said the boy.
"just a quiet place to sit and rest.
I am very tired."
"Well," said the tree, straightening
herself up as much as she could,
"well, an old stump is good for sitting and resting
Come, Boy, sit down. Sit down and rest."
And the boy did.
And the tree was happy.

What is this story about? Is it about a selfish boy and man who should have made better choices? Maybe, in fact, that is probably part of it. But, in reality, each of us as Christians were and are totally in need of Christ’s sacrificial death for our sins. He is our giving Tree. Whether we wanted it or not, Jesus was cut off for us, our sin led to His death. It shouldn’t take long for our anger toward the self-centered boy in the story to find its way back to us. We are completely dependent on Jesus the One True Vine. Today I want to look at John 15:18, in order for us to understand the boy’s attitude as the attitude of the world and the tree’s attitude as the way of Christ and the Christian. The way of the world is the way of self-promotion and the way of Christ is the way of empowering others by way of introducing them to God through sacrifice of self.

Let’s begin with John 15:18:

“*“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 what I told you: ‘A servant is not 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; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, 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 Advocate 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 fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are 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 their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you,*” (John 15:18–16:4, NIV)

Before going any further, I think we should define some terms, first off the word “world.” John 3:16-17 records:

“*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall 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.*” (John 3:16–17, NIV)

But:

 1 John 2:15-16 records:

“*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.*” (1 John 2:15–16, NIV)

Are we supposed to love the world or not?

Context, context, context, as one author explained:

“When we are told not to love the world, the Bible is referring to the world’s corrupt value system. Satan is the god of this world (system), and he has his own value system contrary to God’s.

In fact, this week, I had someone ask me about the covid-19 vaccine. They asked me if it could be the “Mark of the Beast.”

Over the years I’ve had people ask me if microchips, credit cards, tattoos, and other things could be the mark. In my opinion, the mark isn’t literal, I agree with one theologian who says:

“The ‘mark of the Beast,’ like God’s seal on the church is not an ‘outward tattoo or insignia on the body, but rather a symbol of the beast’s ownership and control of his followers’ thoughts (forehead) and deeds (right) hand. The beast’s mark and God’s seal are “made visible in people’s norms, values, and beliefs.”

The same author also wrote:

“Although many people apply beast imagery to a supposed end-time individual, the Bible always applies beast imagery to empires, forces, and entities that transcend the individual.”

This should help us to understand that you cannot take the “mark” on accident. Let’s pretend that taking a vaccine could be a symbol of the beast’s control.

There will be some people who take the Covid-19 vaccine because they are living according to the world’s values…they think they can control their own destiny and the vaccine is one part of doing that. They may even take the vaccine because they think of the government as their savior.

And then there will be Christians who take the vaccine because they believe it is part of showing kindness, respect, and love for the rest of the population.

And there will be Christians who believe that part of their faith journey includes not taking the vaccine.

When we are told not to love the world, it means that we should despise the world’s view of selfishness and self-preservation and self-aggrandizement. It doesn’t mean that we are to hate life and the enjoyments of living with and loving all people.

From the story of the Good Samaritan and the fact that Jesus says we should “love our enemies,” it is clear that we are not to hate unbelievers. But we are to hate attitudes, actions, and emotions that stem from a system that promotes and encourages a selfish, self-indulgent desire to be happy no matter what it costs the people around us. Though we are all like the boy who needs something from the tree, it is the system that dominates us that defines us. Who has dominion over you God or you? If it is you, then what you are really saying is that it is the world.

Please understand that this is an ongoing battle, this is why Jesus says you can’t love both. Today, if you are a Christian, then you hate the idea of being mastered by the world’s system of thought and its priorities.

If you are a Christian, then you probably find it easy to see yourself as the boy in the story and God as the giving tree…Which in turn leads you to want to be someone who gives.

 But this is not the case for those who hate Jesus and His disciples. Instead Jesus said:

“*Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not 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; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, 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.’*” (John 15:20–25, NIV)

Those who had embraced the world’s value system hated Jesus without cause. Ultimately, they hated Jesus because he modeled an unselfish way of life and then asked those who would follow Him to do the same thing. They persecuted Jesus and thus showed their disdain for the Father. In fact, they were so sure of themselves and their own motives Jesus said:

“*They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.*” (John 16:2, NIV)

So why did Jesus tell His disciples these things? Why was it important for them and for us to know that some, even some who might say they are “from God,” are going to hate true Christians and persecute them? The answer is found in chapter 16 verses 1 and 4:

“*“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away.*” (John 16:1, NIV)

“*I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you,*” (John 16:4, NIV)

Any time the words “fall away” are used we are quick to think that someone is losing their salvation. But this just is not the case. The King James Version, in this case, better translates the Greek by interpreting 16:1 as:

“These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.”

The Greek word that is often translated as “fall away” is actually defined as:

Causing someone to experience anger and/or shock because of what has been said or done—“ to cause one to be offended, to offend.”

Jesus didn’t want His disciples to be angry or shocked when He was crucified (His plan, from the beginning, was to be a giving tree). After He was gone, when His disciples were despised and persecuted by non-believers, He wanted them to stay the course. We are supposed to be the love-givers in this world.

Why are you seeking God? Is it primarily for self-interest? Is it so you can feel better about yourself? Is it so you can get a leg up on the competition? That is the world’s system no matter what kind of christianese you try to bathe it in.

Any good we do in order convince God, ourselves, or others that we are good is actually born out of the world’s system.

And any good we do because we are convinced that God is Good will look foolish according to the world’s standards and be despised by those who desire to have dominion in their own lives and in the lives of others.

The giving tree looks like a sucker, to people who love the attitudes of the world. But to the Christian, the Tree who was cut-off, can help us understand Christ. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.

“*Remember what (Jesus) told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*” (John 15:20, NIV)

This truth cannot be dodged. Some will have the seal of Christ others the clear evidence of the world’s system.

Which do you desire?

Like the tree are you “very happy” when others benefit from your gifts?

Or like the boy, are you trying to get everything you can out of the tree?

Before I finish, I want to use one more illustration from the story.

With God, as with the Tree, as long as you are living, there is time to return to Him.

Don’t wait a day longer, tell Jesus how thankful you are for all He has given you and then find rest in Him instead of all of His goods.