

Main Idea: In John 15:23-27 Jesus talks to His followers about bearing fruit when the soil is hard. We need to keep in mind three things: the reasons, the resource, and the responsibility.

- I. We need to keep in mind the reasons (23-25).
    - A. We are opposed because of our involvement with one another (17).
    - B. We are opposed because of our identification with Christ (18-20).
    - C. We are opposed because of our intimacy with God (21).
    - D. We are opposed because of our integrity (22).
    - E. We are opposed because of spiritual ignorance (23-24).
    - F. We are opposed because of irrational thinking (25).
  - II. We need to keep in mind the resource (26).
    - A. Jesus didn't leave us to fend for ourselves.
    - B. Jesus provided a Helper.
      1. He is the Counselor.
      2. He is the representative of Christ.
      3. He is the source of truth.
      4. He is the contact to the Father.
      5. He is the communicator of Christ.
  - III. We need to keep in mind the responsibility (27).
    - A. Our mission isn't merely a defensive one.
    - B. Our mission is to tell the world about Jesus.
- The Bottom Line: It boils down to this...
1. We are living in enemy territory.
  2. We have all we need to experience the fruitful life.

We've been learning about bearing fruit recently as we've journeyed with Jesus through John 15. *He will bear much fruit.* That's what the Master said regarding the person who abides in Him. An amazing offer. And I want to experience it, and for you as well.

But Jesus didn't say this fruit-bearing would be easy. There are hindrances to it.

Growing up my parents always raised a big garden. I enjoyed the fruit of the garden—the sweet corn, the peas, the watermelon. But to get the fruit, there were obstacles that needed to be faced and overcome.

Weeds. Weather. Insects. So forth.

It's no different in the Christian life, and this morning Jesus is going to talk to us about one of the barriers to fruit-bearing. Hard soil. The hatred of the world.

You are well aware of the increasing antagonism towards Bible-believing, evangelical Christians. In John Piper's excellent book, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, he says there are 200,000 Christian martyrs in the world every year.<sup>1</sup> That breaks down to 500 every day. Or to put it another way, a follower of Christ loses his life *every three minutes*.

Of course, this is not a new phenomenon. When Peter wrote his first epistle he began, “Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ. To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.”

The Bible calls Christians “strangers” [KJV ‘sojourners’]. To the world, we are strange. We don't fit in. We're peculiar. We're offensive. We are hated.

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 75

Paul put it this way. “We are fools for Christ's sake (1 Cor 4:10).” “Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world (1 Cor 4:12-13).”

We see what happens to the scum of the earth in Acts 22. There a Jewish mob turned on the apostle Paul for his commitment to preach Christ to all people. He tried to defend himself. Remember the response? Acts 22:22, “The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”

So is it possible to live in this hostile environment and be fruitful? Yes it is! But how? Jesus answers that question for us at the end of John 15.

I want to remind you of something as we approach the final section of the chapter. When Jesus spoke the words recorded in John 14-16, He had one chief aim in mind. With His death and His departure from the world being imminent, He wanted to prepare His followers for His absence.

How should they live when He was gone? He gave them an illustration. He told them, “I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in Me, you will bear much fruit.” He also spoke candidly to them about the environment in which they would be planted.

That brings us to today’s text. In John 15:23-27 Jesus talks to His followers about bearing fruit when the soil is hard. We need to keep in mind three things: the *reasons*, the *resource*, and the *responsibility*.

#### I. We need to keep in mind the reasons (23-25).

Last time we were in John 15 we asked the question *why?* Why does the world oppose Christians? Why do they hate us? Jesus gives us six reasons. We looked at the first four in verses 18-22.

**A. We are opposed because of our involvement with one another (17).** “Love one another,” He told us. But our self-denying love exposes the world’s self-centeredness. And that irritates them.

**B. We are opposed because of our identification with Christ (18-20).** The reason the world hates *us* is because it hated *Him*—and we are His. Verse 18—“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.”

**C. We are opposed because of our intimacy with God (21).** “They do not know the One who sent Me,” Jesus said. But because of His grace, we do. And the fact that we *do* exposes the fact that they *don’t*.

**D. We are opposed because of our integrity (22).** Jesus said, “They have no excuse for their sin.” Our integrity reminds them that there is a divine, moral standard—and they’ve missed it. So it’s either conform to the standard, or get rid of the reminder.

It boils down to this. The reason the world hates Christians is because the world hated Christ.

But that doesn’t make sense. Jesus came to rescue mankind. Why did the world hate Him, and now hate us? Jesus Himself reveals two additional reasons in verses 23-25.

**E. We are opposed because of spiritual ignorance (23-24).** Notice Jesus’ words in verse 23, “He who hates me hates my Father as well.”

That’s interesting. There’s a connection between the world’s hatred of Christians, of Christ, and of the Father. Jesus said clearly the reason the world hated Him was because it hated God the Father.

The *world* refers to society, a society which is apart from God and in opposition to God. It's a society which is in the stranglehold of the Evil one.

In reality, there are two groups of people on planet earth. There's the Church, and there's the world. The Church is comprised of individuals who have confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord. Conversely, the world is made up of people who do not bow to Christ. The world rejects Christ. The world hates Christ.

But don't get the idea that there is only one kind of "world." There is only one truth, but error comes in a host of shapes and sizes. As D.A. Carson suggests, "The world wears many ugly faces."<sup>2</sup> Nazism was anti-God. So is Communism. But so is raw-secularism, and greedy materialism. So are the special interest groups that promote alternate, immoral lifestyles. They are all anti-God, anti-Bible, and anti-Christ.

Here's the irony. As individual groups, Nazis and communists and materialists may hate each other. But they have one thing in common. Together, they hate biblical Christianity, and try to snuff it out. And so Hitler killed Bonhoeffer, and Stalin executed countless believers.

But again, why? What did Jesus say is the real problem of the person who hates Him? It is spiritual ignorance. He says in verse 21, "They will treat you this way because of my name, for *they do not know* the One who sent me." If the people in Jesus' day had really known God, they would have loved Jesus. But they didn't know God. That's why they hated Jesus.

Their problem was not a lack of evidence. Notice verse 24, "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."

Jesus' works were unique. He did what no other man had ever done. His works actually upset some people, especially the hypocritical religious leaders.

Take John 9 as a case in point. Jesus healed a man born blind. The Pharisees couldn't deny the evidence. But they refused to put their trust in Jesus. Instead, His miracle only fanned the flame of their hatred for Him.

Even more compelling is what Jesus did for Lazarus (in John 11). The man had been dead four days. His body had been anointed, wrapped, placed in a tomb, and begun to decay. Yet Jesus called him back to life!

Yet how did people respond to this undeniable miracle? Some believed in Jesus (11:45). But others determined to eliminate Him (see 11:46-48).

Why? Why did Jesus' works offend people? You would think that everyone would have applauded at His miracles. They didn't. Why not? Jesus' works revealed that Jesus was unique.

You see, a person is who different threatens the establishment. He breaks the curve on the grading scale. He exposes. He intimidates.

Jesus made people feel uncomfortable. Of Jesus they said, "Never a man did this!" His holy presence and righteous deeds exposed their sinfulness. When He entered the room, He was like a spotlight that revealed every sin-stained spot in their lives.

True, He offered forgiveness. But some chose to reject Him rather than admit their need for forgiveness. They were blinded by their spiritual ignorance.

You see, human beings are supposed to know God. After all, we were created in His image (Gen 1:27). He reveals Himself to us through His creation, so that we are without

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<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, p. 117.

excuse for not knowing Him (Rom 1:20). On top of that, He's given us the Scriptures, and His Son.

So we ought to know God. And the average person on the street thinks he knows God. Just ask him or her.

Yet Jesus' claim makes this clear. The only way to have a relationship with God the Father is through His Son (John 14:6). If you don't know Jesus, you don't know God.

If you ask the guy at work who hassles you for being a Christian, "Who was Jesus?" What answer would you get? "Jesus was a nice guy that did a lot of good for people. He taught about peace and love, but was misunderstood, and unfortunately got killed."

When someone views Jesus merely as a person who never raised His voice, who never spoke a critical word, who was a moral reformer that did a lot of good, there's a person has an inadequate view of Jesus. The fact is, Jesus offended the religious establishment, intentionally. Jesus exposed sin and hypocrisy, intentionally. Jesus condemned injustice, intentionally. Jesus claimed to be the only way to God, intentionally. That's why He was hated. As are His people who say so.

*Spiritual ignorance.* Here's a sixth reason...

#### **F. We are opposed because of irrational thinking (25).**

Let me ask you, "Did the world's hatred of Jesus catch God off guard?" No, it didn't. In fact, listen to what Jesus said in verse 25, "But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'"

Notice the words "their Law." That was a poke. Jesus knows that those who first hated Him prided themselves in knowing their Law. But if they really knew *their* Law, they'd know *Me*, says Jesus. For *their* Law speaks of Me.

Jesus seems to be quoting from a phrase in Psalm 35:19 and Psalm 69:4. The latter reads, "Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me." Psalm 69 is actually Messianic psalm.

It's amazing. The world hated Jesus for WITHOUT A CAUSE. For no just reason.

You hear the news and learn about churches being burned in Egypt and Iraq, and you say, "Why are they doing that? It doesn't make sense. It's so irrational."

Yes, it is. But our hatred is irrational too. Why would two people who were once crazy about each other, made a vow before God and have spent ten married years together, get to the point where they hate each other and choose to throw in the towel on each other, even though that means they will inflict great pain on their kids, their friends, and even themselves? Hatred is so irrational.

But the most irrational hatred of all is to hate Jesus.

You say, "That's something I don't do. I don't hate Jesus."

Let me ask you this. Who is the person who hates Jesus? It's not just the atheist who shakes his fist at God. So do religious people (that's who Jesus had in mind when he said this).

To hate someone means I don't give him his rightful place or treatment in my life. If you are prejudiced, and hate a person because he has a different color of skin, then you won't give him his rightful place or treatment.

When we refuse to give Jesus the place He deserves in our lives, when we choose to live as though He didn't create us, and didn't come to save us, and doesn't deserve the

place of honor in our lives, how's that different from the atheist? Nothing is more irrational than hating Jesus.

We're learning how to bear fruit in enemy territory. It starts with understanding why the soil is hard to begin with. So Jesus gives us the reasons. But that's not all He gave us.

## II. We need to keep in mind the resource (26).

“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.”

Right here we discover a couple of important realities which give us tremendous hope as we live in this hostile world.

**A. Jesus didn't leave us to fend for ourselves.** To the contrary...

**B. Jesus provided a Helper.** Or to put it another way, Jesus didn't leave His followers in this hateful world without help. He gave them a resource—the Holy Spirit.

The Lord already introduced the subject of the coming ministry of the Spirit back in chapter 14 (verses 16-17, 26). And He will develop this theme further in chapter 16. But here in chapter 15, He refers to the Spirit in the context of the hostility of the world.

We see the Trinity here, don't we? Verses 18-22 speak of the world's attitude towards God the *Son*, verses 23-25 speak of God the *Father*, and verse 26 speaks of God the *Holy Spirit*.

As Jesus' followers, we are living on enemy territory. But we are not on our own. We have the incredible resource of God the Holy Spirit.

What does Jesus tell us about the Holy Spirit in verse 26? Five characteristics...

1. *He is the Counselor.* Jesus calls Him the *paraklatos*, the “one called alongside to help.” The Holy Spirit is the *resident helper*.

You say, “I'm weak. I don't think I can go back to that wicked office one more day.” Friends, we are weak. But we don't stand for Jesus in our own strength. We have the Spirit of Christ, and He's the One Who comforts, counsels, guides, and helps us.

2. *He is the representative of Christ.* Please notice that the Holy Spirit was sent by the Son. “When the Counselor comes, *whom I will send to you* from the Father.” So everything that Jesus was to the Twelve, the Spirit is to us, only more so. Jesus taught. So does the Spirit. Jesus rebuked. So does the Spirit. Jesus encouraged. So does the Spirit. The Spirit is the resident representative of Christ in our lives.

How does He carry out His ministry with us? Jesus explains in the next phrase. He calls Him “the Spirit of truth.” That indicates...

3. *He is the source of truth.* The Holy Spirit is truth. What's more, according to John 16:13-14, He is the giver of truth: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you [Jesus is speaking to the apostles] 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. <sup>14</sup> He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”

And that's what the Spirit did. He came at Pentecost. Later He revealed truth to the apostles who in turn proclaimed it to others. Eventually, this truth was recorded in the New Testament Scriptures. Today we have the Bible because the Spirit is the *source of truth*.

4. *He is the contact to the Father.* Jesus said about the Spirit, “Who goes out from the Father.” The Holy Spirit has come from the Father. He enables us to have access to the Father (Rom 8:26).

The next point is critical. What did Jesus say would be the primary aim of the Spirit? Verse 26 concludes, “He will testify about me.” To put it another way...

5. *He is the communicator of Christ.* The reason the Holy Spirit came to this world on the day of Pentecost wasn't to bring attention to Himself. It was to make Christ known. More about that in a moment. First, back to our question...

Is it really possible to bear fruit while living in enemy territory? Yes it is, as long as what? As long as we heed the call of John 15 and *remain in the vine*.

In his book, *Secrets of the Vine*, Bruce Wilkinson shares this personal discovery:

“One day, in a library, I happened upon a lithograph of a legendary vineyard set on a rocky hillside high above Germany's Rhine River. The illustration shows vines that had been producing bountiful harvests for generations. An insert depicted one of the vines. It came out of the ground thick as an elephant's trunk. All along the row, enormous clusters of grapes hung down through the light canopy of leaves.

“For years people wondered how these vines could flourish in such an inhospitable environment. An accompanying text explained: ‘The roots of the ancient plants have been traced to the distant river.’”

Wilkinson concludes, “That ancient vineyard reminds me that I can always be ‘present’ with God, no matter what is whirling around me. God invites us to be tapped into His purposes and power *all the time*.”<sup>3</sup>

Brothers and sisters, we have an amazing resource. Let this sink in. Yes, hostility is inevitable. Opposition is unavoidable. So if we're going to live for Christ, we'll feel the hatred of the world. But we can endure *and bear fruit*...as long as we depend upon the resource He's given us, the person of the Holy Spirit.

But keep this in mind. Jesus didn't give us His Spirit to help us accomplish *our* agenda. It's *His* agenda that the Spirit wants to energize us to accomplish.

And just what is that agenda? Jesus tells us in verse 27. It's the third truth we need to keep in mind if we're going to bear fruit when the soil is hard. First, keep in mind the reasons. Second, keep in mind the resource. Third...

### III. We need to keep in mind the responsibility (27).

“And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”

Please notice that the verb “testify” [KJV, ‘bear witness’] in verse 27 is the same word Jesus just used in verse 26. That's significant. What Jesus said the Spirit would do is the very thing He told His disciples they should do. He who is the communicator of Christ enables Christ's followers to do the same.

But how does He do it? How does the Holy Spirit testify of Jesus in this hateful world? Does He write Bible verses in the clouds, like jet streams? Does He make images of Jesus appear for people to see on the wall? How does the Spirit testify of Jesus?

He does it *through people*. The Spirit bears witness of Christ through the followers of Christ. That's critical to see.

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Wilkinson, pp. 109-10.

So while we're living in enemy territory, our aim is not merely to hold on, to endure. Or to put it this way...

**A. Our mission isn't merely a defensive one.** It's offensive, too.

And just what is our offensive assignment?

**B. Our mission is to tell the world about Jesus.** Verse 27—"And you also must testify." Actually, right here is another version of the Great Commission. Jesus has given us a task to do. We have a high calling.

But why us? Listen to the reason He gave the Eleven (27). "You must testify...*for* you have been with me from the beginning."

Privilege involves responsibility. To whom much is given much is required. The twelve disciples had the privilege of being with Jesus for three years, of hearing Him teach, of watching His miracles, of eating the bread He created out of five loaves. They were privileged. They knew Jesus.

But they weren't to hoard that privilege. They were to pass it on. And so are we.

I must warn you. It may cost you. The Greek word "testify" [or "bear witness"] is the word *martureo*. We get our English word "martyr" from it. See the connection? When we bear witness to Jesus in a hostile world, we'll have to pay a price. Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."<sup>4</sup>

You say, "But Jesus gave this instruction to the apostles. We're not apostles."

True, but the responsibility to witness belongs to every one of us who knows Christ. To become a Christian what must a person do, according to Romans 10:9? "That if you *confess with your mouth*, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

The Christian life begins with verbal activity, with the use of the *mouth*. And it continues the same way.

Romans 10:14-15 asks, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone *preaching* to them? <sup>15</sup> And how can they preach unless they are sent?"

And that's what happened to us. We have been *sent*. The Savior gave us a mission that began with the apostles and will continue until God has rescued a people from every nation, tribe, and language. Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and *you will be my witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Oh friend, please listen. If Jesus left us in this world for no other reason than to endure the scorn and hatred of the world, we would be most miserable. But when He left us, He gave us a high privilege, along with a Helper to aid us.

We are here to tell others about Him! Our primary responsibility in this life is to testify to Christ and point people to Him.

Do you know what one of the devil's most effective war tactics is? It's to distract us. He loves to sidetrack us, to get us preoccupied with other things, even good things. Like jobs, and school, and even family time. While all the while, the mission collects dust on the back shelf of our lives.

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<sup>4</sup> In Wiersbe, p. 361.

When was the last time you shared Christ with another person? Brothers and sisters, *we have a responsibility*. If we know the truth about Christ, we must do something with what we know. “You also must *testify*,” He said. That’s why we’re here.

As a third-century man was anticipating death, he penned these last words to a friend: "It's a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people are the Christians--and I am one of them."<sup>5</sup>

The Bottom Line: It boils down to this...

1. *We are living in enemy territory*. The ground is hard. The world is hostile. But...
2. *We have all we need to experience the fruitful life*. Let us never forget the reasons, the resource, and the responsibility Jesus has given us. “If a man remains in me and I in him, he *will* [that’s a promise] *bear much fruit*.”

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<sup>5</sup> *Today In The Word*, June, 1988, p. 18.