**Last Thoughts:** **Exposé**

**3-29-20**

It began as a clandestine meeting under the cover of darkness.

* A leading governmental official and religious leader rendezvoused with a known subversive to find out just what he has in mind.

*2 “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”*

* + Ah, these “signs”, these miraculous workings that everyone was talking about that gave this particular rabble-rouser credibility not enjoyed by others.
    - Signs that no human being could conjure or fake or perform.
    - But still, they happened – just as they had in days of old.
  + What did he want? What was his end game?
* The Rabbi responds;

*3 “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

* + Oh! So, this is going to be a theological conversation.
    - This religious leader is well-versed in that.
    - Bring it on.

*4 “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?”*

* + Game, Set and Match!
    - That was way too easy.

*5 “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You all must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

* + Now this government official – this religious leader – is in the dark more than just physically.
    - He is unexpectedly perplexed, and not understanding anything Jesus is saying.

*What? How can this be?*

*10 Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you all do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you all earthly things and you all do not believe, how can you all believe if I tell you all heavenly things?*

* Game, Set, Match! Drop the mic!
  + Jesus just exposed Nicodemus and all of his cronies for what they were.
    - Religious leaders who were unwilling to listen to the God they supposedly served.
    - In fact, they weren’t even on the same wave-length.
      * Later Jesus would call them *the blind leading the blind a*nd *hypocrites*.
      * Who *shut the Kingdom of Heaven in people’s faces* and lead others to be *twice as much the children of hell than themselves.* **CHANGE VIEW**
* Jesus’ harshest words were reserved for these who had all the opportunity, the training, the biblical expertise and the time for worship and prayer to know better – but instead resisted Him.
  + On the day that the Son of God visited them, they threw Him out on His ear.
    - Because God’s theology didn’t match theirs.

That meeting with Nicodemus was back in John 3 when Jesus was just getting started.

* But by John 15, Jesus was getting ready to leave this earth.
  + Within just a few short hours, He would be taken, tried by these very same religious leaders, and given over to the pagan Romans to slaughter Him on a cross.
* So, in the time he had left, Jesus shared some last thoughts with his disciples.

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + And among them were these words from vss. 18-25

*18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 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. 20 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. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. 22 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. 23 Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. 24 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. 25 But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’*

Of course, this is from Jesus’ point of view (and His Father’s).

* Which is the only righteous point of view. **CHANGE VIEW**
  + After all, there was no GOOD reason that the Religious Leaders of Israel would hate Jesus.
    - He was the Messiah they had been waiting for for better than 400 years!
    - He fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies and brought God’s salvation to His people.
  + With this in mind, why would the religious leaders hate Him – they should have been the first to welcome Him with open arms.
* But from the point of view of the Pharisees and other religious leaders of Jesus’ day, they had plenty of reason to hate Jesus!
  + Because He exposed them for the self-centered, legalistic theologically inept bumblers that they were.
    - This is why I started this morning with the story of Nicodemus.
    - Because it was one of the first examples in the ministry of Jesus where He undresses this sophisticated religious man.
      * And exposes him – in Nicodemus’ case, to himself.
      * Think of how humiliating it was when this carpenter says to this highly educated doctor of theology: *And you call yourself a teacher of Israel, but don’t understand this most basic thing?*
  + Now nobody likes being exposed like that (though a lot of times the downtrodden love to see big shots get their comeuppance).
    - Consider how one of the most popular genres of literature today are the “tell all books”.

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + - * “Find out what really went on in the White House!”
      * “See Who’s behind FBI corruption”
      * “Scandal Revealed at “so-and-so’s” church”
      * Congressman Exposed as a Philanderer”
    - It’s the Exposé that delivers the knock-out punch leading to resignations, excommunications, defrocking and humiliation.
      * People with something to hide hate those who come to expose it – to bring it into the light of day.
      * And John says that Jesus was hated because of this very thing. John 3:19-20 we read:

*19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.*

And in John 15, Jesus warns His disciples that this is exactly why they will be hated by the world.

* He begins by pointing out that it is not really them that will be hated, but rather that it is because of their association with Him.
  + It is part and parcel of being His and of choosing to walk with Him.
    - The world (specifically the Jewish religious leaders) persecuted Him, so
    - It is only natural that, after He is gone, those same leaders will go after (which is what the Greek word for persecute means) His disciples.
      * In fact, in John 16:2, Jesus tells the disciples:

*2 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.*

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + - * They will literally use God’s name in order to silence God’s voice.
  + And they will do it because they have been exposed.
    - So they are trying to cover-up their nakedness by lashing out at those who are shining the light on them.
    - A little bit like the Chinese Government who, apparently, arrested 8 Chinese doctors for trying to get word out about COVID-19 in the early days of the crisis before it became a Pandemic.
      * The Government didn’t want the exposure, so they locked up those who were trying to turn on the lights.
* Jesus explains exactly how He brought about such vile contempt from the world in vss. 22-24.

**CHANGE VIEW**

*22 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. 23 Whoever hates me hates my Father also. 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.*

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + Nicodemus came to Jesus and heard what He had to say.
    - He asked Him questions and Jesus schooled him in his spiritual ignorance.
    - And now he could not “unhear” it.
      * Now he was accountable for what He knew.
      * And to his credit, we find later that he apparently confessed his ignorance and entrusted himself to Jesus.
  + But others were not so wise.
    - They too listened to his teachings and asked Him many questions.
      * On many occasions they argued with Him and saw just how wrong they were about so many things.
      * And finally, in Matthew 23, we see Jesus pronounce a series of woes upon the Pharisees, warning them of God’s judgement unless they submitted to the God they supposedly served.
  + Jesus tells his disciples that had the Pharisees never heard the Word of Truth sent from the Father to them, then they would not be guilty of sinning against the Father in this way.
    - But because they heard Him, understood Him, and even argued with Him, they now had no excuse for their blindness.

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + - * But the Greek word translated “excuse” is so much more descriptive than the English conveys.
        + The word actually refers to a large cloak under which they were hiding their sin.
        + In Jesus’s coming and speaking with them, that cloak is literally torn away and their sin is exposed for all to see.

They are blind leaders

Self-serving hypocrites

Self-righteous elitists

* + - * + But now, “the emperors had no clothes” – no cloak of deception to cover them.
* And they hated Jesus for it. And they killed Jesus for it.
  + And Jesus told His disciples here in John 15 that they should expect no different treatment.
    - For they belong to Jesus.
    - And even though THEY DID NOT expose the Pharisee and other religious leaders of the day.
    - Their very presence reminded everyone of the One who did – and continues to do so.
      * Because truth cannot be unheard.
      * And signs cannot be unseen.

*So,* Jesus said, *I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away…[so] that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.* (Jn 16:1,4)

So what is it about this passage that relates to us today? What can we learn?

* First, as the church of Jesus Christ, we should expect to be hated and opposed by some in the world for little reason more than the fact that we follow Jesus.
  + I received a map from the organization, the Voice of the Martyrs, this week indicating the most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian.
    - It encompasses much of Asia and southeast Asia as well as large parts of Africa and the Middle East.
    - And as I looked at the map, I wondered what it was about the church that was so appalling to those in power.
      * In most of these places the church is very poor and powerless – having little political or religious clout.
      * They also tend to be pretty quiet, peace-loving and obedient to civil government.
      * In other words, there are few practical reasons why the church should attract so much attention and suffer such persecution.
    - Yet in country after country, the church of Jesus Christ suffers.
      * Some at the hands of secularists, some at the hands of Islamists, some at the hands of Buddhists, and some at the hands of just plain criminals.
      * But the one thing that will save these believers no matter who their opposition is the same: renounce the name of Jesus.
        + Give up His Lordship in your life and you are free to go.

*19 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.*

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + The opposition in this country is not nearly so extreme, but the hatred is just as real, as you can see just by reading the comments section of news reports having to do with believers.
    - You will be hated and opposed because Jesus was.
* A second lesson from this passage is that as followers of Jesus, let’s make sure that we are hated and opposed ONLY because of Jesus in our lives.
  + I think we have all met some believers who are pretty hard to like and might be pretty easy to hate.
    - From their business practices to “holier than thou” attitudes, some Christians bring a lot of negative responses upon themselves simply by the way they interact with the world.
      * But remember that Jesus said that He was persecuted “for no reason” other than just being who He was and doing the will of His Father.
      * We need to be sure that we give no reason other than who we are in Christ Jesus for people to hate us either.
  + But again, what is it that is so offensive about Jesus that people will hate us for it.
    - The Apostle Paul, in all of his years of writing narrowed it down to one thing: the cross of Christ.

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + - * In Philippians 3:18, Paul warns the Philippians,

*18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.*

*18 For the word of the cross*, **Paul writes in 1 Cor. 1:18**, *is folly to those who are perishing,*

Because by it, 19 God *destroys the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning* [He] *thwarts.”*

* + - It is the cross of Christ that exposes the wisdom of humanity to be foolishness and their righteousness to be as filthy rags.

*21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles… 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*

* + - You see, we human beings are always trying to prove ourselves to be righteous, to be wise, to be powerful – but God obliterates all of it as deception at the foot of the cross.

*27 God* **[Paul writes]** *chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.*

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + But what that tells us is, let the cross be our offense and nothing else.
    - Don’t try to out-world the world:
      * Showing them how smart we are…
      * Or how righteous we are…
      * Or how clever we are…
      * Or how entitled we are…
    - Rather, gladly accept Paul’s description of us as the lowly, foolish, weak and despised of the world.
      * For when we are weak, that is when we are strong and our only boast is found in the cross of Christ.

*31 Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”*

* + - Give them no other reason to hate us but Christ alone.
* A third lesson we gain from these final thoughts of Jesus for His disciples is that we will be hated and opposed because we are a constant sign of Christ in the world.

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + Back in John 15:19 Jesus said,

*19 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 again, as He prayed for His disciples in John 17:14, Jesus said:

*14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

* + - The Apostle Paul tells us that the church of Jesus Christ is, just by its presence, an offense to many in the world.
      * He writes in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16

*15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, 16 to one a stench from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?*

* + This is the flip-side to the whole 10 to 1 reality of the church.
    - I usually talk about the church as the fragrance of life to life.
      * This is certainly the picture of Zechariah 8:23 from where we get the 10 to 1 image.

*23 In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’”*

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + - * But the other side of this truth is that for every person who smells the sweet fragrance of Christ on us.
      * There may be 3 or 4 who smell the stench of death – their own death – on us and hate us for it.
    - And it’s not because of anything we have done or even said – far be it from us to add any offense to the Gospel.
      * But its because we carry around on our person the smell of Jesus.
      * We are a work of His hands, a sign of His coming.

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + - * And He said in John 15:

*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.*

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + The Church – the assembly of those saved by grace – is a miraculous working of Christ that all can see and know and touch.
    - Jesus told his disciples that had the world not seen His works, then they wouldn’t be guilty.
      * But they have seen them and now cannot unsee them.
      * And thus, the presence of His church tears away the cloak that hides their nakedness before God and they stand guilty before Him.
    - Because of this, they hate Him and His Father, and by extension us.
      * Because we are an ever-present reminder of their own nakedness – the stench of death.
  + No wonder John reminds the church in 1 John 3:13:

*Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.*

* There is a final lesson from this text that I want to share that can be somewhat disconcerting, but one we need to be ever vigilant about.
  + When you look at the text of John 15, who is this “world” that Jesus is talking about?
    - Is it the Roman armies, the Greeks, the pagans of far off lands?
      * I suppose they all might be included as “the world”.
      * But specifically, that is not who Jesus is talking about in this text.
    - No, “the world” in this text is made up of the religious folks in Israel.

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + - * And most specifically, the sect of the Pharisees, who in the Judaism of Jesus day would have been the most popular, most Bible centered, most evangelical religious leaders of all.
      * They were the literalists, those who took the Scriptures seriously, those who were most scrupulous in following the Law to the letter.
      * They accepted a 6-Day creation, a literal flood, the reality of Jonah, the monarchy of David, the resurrection of the dead and the coming of a literal, long-prophesied Messiah.

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + - * In other words, of all the sects in Judaism, they were the most like us in so many ways.
    - But as a group, they hated Jesus.
  + Why?
    - Because He exposed them as having all the trappings of good religion, but none of the depth of relationship with God that God desired.
      * Jesus referred to them as “whitewashed tombs”.
      * Beautiful on the outside, but on the inside filled with dead men’s bones.
    - They believed God was more concerned with condemning people that with saving them.
      * With pointing our wrongs than with inviting them to find grace in His love.
  + And when the Messiah arrived and they suddenly discovered that He came not to condemn the world but to save it, they opposed Him and eventually killed Him.
    - For they were totally invested in the business of condemnation.
  + To this I say, let us be careful, church.
    - For we can become “the world” that Jesus was talking about if we are not careful.
    - It has happened before:

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + - * When Joan of Arc was burned at the stake, as well as Archbishop Thomas Cranmer of England, Bishops of the Church stood near the flames self-righteously praying for their souls.
      * Or when Anabaptists arose during the reformation – believers who practiced believer’s baptism rather than infant baptism and who were generally pacifists – the rest of the church sought to destroy them.
        + And we are not just talking Roman Catholics here.
        + But Lutherans and Calvinists and followers of Zwingli – that is, the churches birthed out of the Reformation…

They all attacked and burned and looted the villages of the Anabaptists as well.

**CHANGE VIEW**

* + - Whenever the church becomes puffed up with self-righteousness and power…
      * Whenever we begin to write the rules and become the enforcers of the Law…
      * When we lose the compassion of Christ and seek our own power or comfort or position…
      * It is then that we become “the world”.
        + When we no longer are the stench of death to the world because of the aroma of Christ on us.
        + But carry a different stench because we have ourselves become whitewashed tombs.

Looking so good on the outside, but filled with death.

May it never be.

* But let us accept the price of being a work of Jesus in the world.
  + The price of giving up our pride and accomplishments as rubbish – in the words of Paul…
  + And accepting being the things that are not, so that by us God exposes those who think they are.
    - So that some, like Nicodemus, might come to know Christ and the joy of His great salvation.
    - But also recognizing that for others, it will mean they will likely hate and oppose us because of the cross.

*20 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.*

Let’s pray

Offering and closing song.