

In It, Not Of It

by Mark Jarvinen

Since today is Mother's Day, I'd like to introduce you to my mother, **Barbara Asplund Jarvinen**, who lived from 1933 to 1992. We marked the 25th year since her death last December. She grew up in a town of 60,000, named **Waukegan, Illinois**, about 40 miles North of Chicago. I once asked Mom what her hometown was most famous for. She said it was best known as **Jack Benny's hometown**. For those of you who have never heard of Jack Benny, he was considered the most popular radio comedian of the 1930's and 40's, with a listenership of over 22 million every Sunday night. His program became a popular TV program in the 50's. Part of his comedy bit was to insist on each birthday that he was never older than 39, so when Waukegan named a Middle School after him in 1961, the football team was called the 39ers in honor of Benny's self-imposed age limit. But perhaps Jack Benny's greatest legacy was the lasting tribute he paid to his wife, **Mary Livingstone**. He made arrangements that upon his death, flowers would be sent to her every day for the rest of her life, which turned out to be 9 more years. That's almost 3,300 days worth of flowers!

INTRODUCTION

Speaking of lasting tributes, today's text is a portion of a lasting tribute from Jesus to his followers, in what is called His **High Priestly Prayer**. In this prayer, Jesus prays not only for Himself and also for all those whom the Gospel would one day reach (which includes you and me), but He also prays for those who were following Him at the

time of His passion. In fact, John tells us in **18:1** that immediately after His prayer, Jesus crosses the Kidron Valley with these disciples and goes to the olive grove where He was arrested by a detachment of the temple guard, guided by Judas the betrayer, referred to as “**the son of destruction**” in today’s text. For Jesus, the cross was only hours away. Listen as Jesus prays for his remaining disciples in **John 17:11b-19**.

Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 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. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (John 17:11b-19 – ESV)

OUR DIFFICULT MISSION

We can’t miss the impact of this prayer. It is Jesus’ prayer that the disciples will carry on His mission of salvation after He ascends into heaven. This prayer is for us too, for our time, today, that we would be encouraged to carry out Christ’s mission of salvation in the midst of a harsh and hostile world, as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. I hate to use those words, harsh and hostile, but there isn’t really any way to make these words softer. Jesus himself uses plain language in telling us what life on this spinning globe is like for Christians. Jesus had already told His followers that the world would hate them

because they were not of the world, just as He was not of the world. Jesus was about to experience the full hatred of the world in less than 24 hours when He would die on the cross for the sins of the world. He paid sin's full and horrible penalty for us, but it seems there is still plenty of hatred to go around.

I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. Hatred is everywhere. You know it, you read about it all the time, you see it on TV; you listen to it on the radio. Much of the world is full of hatred. And much of this hatred is directed at God and those who follow him. It's fun to try and humiliate Christians. It's cool to try and poke holes in the faith. I've known people over the years who are reluctant to share their faith at work because they fear being treated differently. There are even atheist groups who take out ads attacking faith. About 15 years ago they started calling themselves the "**Brights**," as if to imply that those of us who believe in God are the "Not-so-brights." Today, according to Wikipedia, it is estimated that the **Brights Movement** numbers 78,000 in 204 countries and territories. It's pretty clear that the life of a Christian isn't supposed to be easy in the short term. Jesus knew hatred, his disciples knew hatred, and frankly all those who follow Jesus will come to know it, at least to some degree. In our country we actually have it comparatively easier than Christians in some parts of the world, but there's no doubt that the harshness and hostility are growing here as well.

WHAT'S OUR RESPONSE?

Sometimes I find that I would like a way out of the struggles of living out my faith. When Jesus says that the world will hate

Christians, my first thought is, “OK then, get us out of here!” I mean wouldn’t that be great? If we could just go somewhere and relax instead of being in the midst of the fight! But according to Christ, that isn’t the game plan for us at all. In fact, it’s just the opposite. In **v. 15** of our text Jesus prays:

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”

Then, in **v. 18**, Jesus continues His prayer to the Father:

“As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”

Sitting on the sidelines isn’t what Christ prayed for concerning the disciples, or you and me for that matter. God won’t have us sit this one out. **He wants us in the world, but not of it.** He makes no promise that things will go easy for us. But he does promise to protect us from the evil one. So we are forgiven, given hope in the resurrection, and we are wrapped up in God’s love in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, we know that the ultimate victory is ours. I’ve skipped ahead to the final chapter of the Bible and guess what? We win! Therefore, we are called to leave the sidelines and get into the game.

FIGHT BACK WITH LOVE!

Remember now, the world hates Christians who are sold out to the truth. **Verse 14** is interesting in that it says,

“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.”

In other words, the Word of God, a.k.a. the truth, takes a believer out of the world system of belief that is anti-God and anti-truth, and

creates hatred in the hearts and minds of those who operate according to the world's anti-God, anti-truth system. So how are we to respond to all this hatred around us? The answer is that we are to fight back, and to fight hard! **Ah! But our weapon isn't more hatred. Our weapon is love.** That's right, love. Jesus is pretty explicit in telling us the harsh truth that the world hates him. The world wants nothing to do with God, or the idea that there is a truth out there, that there is a judge out there, that there is a God who demands accountability. So we see it time and time again, it's nothing new, there is rebellion, and insult, and rejection of the Creator of the Universe. And how does God answer all this? We read about it in that famous verse **John 3:16** – ***“For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son.”*** To a world dead set against him, God sent his own Son to die. To a world that forsakes him, Christ dies to win forgiveness of sins. To a world that rejects him, God never stops calling, ***“Come unto me and I will give you rest”*** (**Matthew 11:28**). God responds to hatred with love. That's how He wants us to respond to the world's hatred as well. But first ...

LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Before we start saying how much those worldly people out there don't deserve it, we have to start with the person we see in the mirror every morning. For as obvious as it is that the world out there needs to change, it is every bit as clear that each of us needs to change as well. We don't have to look past our own hearts to find rebellion against God. We don't have to look beyond our own lips to hear hateful words. We don't have to look past our own lives to find sin! It's so much easier when all this is someone else's problem. But it

isn't just someone else's problem. It's your problem and my problem. We too need the grace of forgiveness.

Jesus says in v. 16 of His prayer: ***“They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”*** But too often I find in my own life, I act like I am of the world. There are times when if I were to be convicted of being a Christian, it would be hard to find the evidence needed to make the conviction stick. I am sure you can think of countless examples of the same in your life. So how is it that God expects us to go out into the world and make a difference? The answer is the same now as it was when Jesus first spoke this prayer. God does not send us out alone, or under only our own power. Jesus prays these words with sinner/saints like us in mind. May the words of Jesus' prayer be seared into our hearts and minds:

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.” (vv. 17-19)

What is Jesus asking when he asks that we would be sanctified? It means that we would be set apart by God for a purpose, even as Jesus was set apart to die on the cross. What is the purpose for which we are set apart? That God would make us holy for a holy mission. **And we are. God makes us Holy through the Holy Spirit's activity in our lives in Word and Sacrament.** The Holy Spirit points us to the truth that Christ died for our sins, that He rose from the dead, and that he is always present and active in our lives. Therefore, you and I being ready to share the love of Christ with others isn't about us or what we in our own strength can do. It's all about God, and what He can do through us!

Through the Holy Spirit working through the Word, we are changed. Bit by bit we become conformed to the image of Christ. Our character, the journey we're on, and how our story will end, take on a new dimension. Along the way, God begins to use us, sanctifying us to be His agents of change to the world around us. Our mission is to continue on in the work that Jesus started. (Oh is that all!). I know it sounds like a huge task, and it is. It sounds like too much for us, and it is. **But it's not too big for God. It's not too big for the cross. It's not too big for the empty tomb. It's not too big for those who have been redeemed in Christ's blood.** Often times, fighting hatred with love takes some very simple forms. We fight with love in the little gestures of concern we share with our friends and co-workers. We fight this battle in love when we listen to those who are hurting, when we share our faith, when we serve others.

CONCLUSION

We are God's and he will use us for His Kingdom purpose. He uses us to be light in the midst of a dark world. He uses us to be the call of love in a world drowning in hatred. He uses us to be the truth of His grace in a world that knows no hope. It's Mother's Day, and as we remember our moms and the importance of strong families, let us also look forward to the coming of the Lord, the day when all who are in Christ, from every kindred and tribe, will truly be one family, worshipping God around His throne of grace. **A-men.**

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