

Hatred - or love?

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[0 : 00] But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. And from one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to anyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods, do not demand them back.

And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. But love your enemies and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. And your reward will be great. And you will be the sons of the Most High.

[1 : 01] For he is kind to the ungrateful and to the evil. Be merciful, even as your father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

Well, our key verse today is verse 36, Luke 6, 36. Be merciful, even as your father is merciful.

It is the issue of family likeness. Perhaps you've been told you have your mother's nose, or your father's ears, or a similar turn of phrase.

You know, that's just the kind of thing your mother would have said, or the same kind of movement of a hand, or something like that. You may be flattered. You may not be flattered.

[2 : 02] But I guess the point, whichever, is authenticity. There's a sense in which we can't help but demonstrate that we belong to our parents.

Last week, we began to look at Jesus' most famous sermon. If you were here, you'll remember chapter 6, verses 12 to 19.

He lays the foundations for a whole new people of God with the appointment of the 12 apostles. And then in verses 20 to 26, he teaches his disciples, and he completely reverses the way in which we look at life.

He says, look, if you are rich simply in this world, then you are poor indeed. And if the security you have is simply security in this world, then you are insecure indeed.

In fact, he says that to be a genuine disciple is so radical, so very countercultural, that far from sort of being part of the establishment, far from fitting in, actually a genuine disciple of Jesus will find themselves on the edge.

[3 : 12] Have a look again, verse 22. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy.

For behold, your reward is great in heaven, for so their fathers did to the prophets. This is normal Christian experience. And that, of course, begs the question, doesn't it?

Well, how on earth do you live as a disciple of Jesus Christ in a world like that? I guess it's an obvious issue for disciples of Jesus living in countries such as Nigeria, and Pakistan, Indonesia, China, and countless others.

But I take it, it is increasingly an urgent issue for us as well. Well, for those of us here this morning who are looking in on the Christian faith, and we're always delighted to have some week by week who are doing that, that I take it at some stage or another, you're going to have to ask this question.

How would I live for Jesus and display the family likeness? Well, you'll see on the back of the service sheet, as usual, there is a talk outline with three simple headings.

[4 : 24] First of all, love your enemies. Love your enemies. And the principle is there in verse 27. But I say to you here, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.

And verse 35, but love your enemies and do good. Do good, says Jesus. It means to act thoughtfully for the benefit of someone else.

And there then follows a whole series of worked examples to help us to get the flavor of what this love looks like in practice. So verse 28, bless those who curse you.

It may be an off-the-cuff comment. It may be a more sustained campaign. But whichever is the kind of thing, isn't it, clearly, which the Lord Jesus anticipates in verses 22 and 23.

At which point, of course, the urge to retaliate is enormous, isn't it? And if not to retaliate, then perhaps simply to avoid that person or that individual or that situation.

[5 : 32] Because I don't want to experience that again. No, says Jesus. Speak well of them. Bless them. It's very different, isn't it, from the mindset of the classroom or the office or whatever it is, where revenge so often is the order of the day.

Pray for those who abuse you. Now, Jesus isn't talking about sexual abuse or abuse of that kind, because remember the context, 6, 22, and 23, is opposition, living in the context of the normal Christian life.

So what Jesus is speaking about here is the exclusion that comes when we are marginalized. Humiliation. Don't seek revenge.

Pray for them instead. And again, it's completely counterculture, isn't it, in our rights-based society, where we are so quick to stand on our rights.

It goes completely against the grain. And, of course, completely against the grain of our culture, which is so quick to take offense. And then, says Jesus, pray for those who abuse you.

[6 : 40] Verse 29, to the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. When you are insulted, at the very deepest level, be willing to face it again.

Don't retreat. Don't decide you're just going to avoid that person, because you don't want to be hurt again. In other words, you see, the love that Jesus speaks about is the love that is ready to lose out, and to continue to lose out.

And from the one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. A readiness to give, and to go on giving. I don't think the Lord Jesus is saying we should simply lie down and wait to be ripped off.

But in a competitive workplace environment, for example, Jesus is saying, be prepared to lose out. Be prepared to keep on giving.

This generous giving love for the sake of the gospel. Verse 30. Give to everyone who begs from you, and for one who takes away your goods, do not demand them back.

[7 : 54] A genuine willingness to meet the needs of others. That word give includes to borrow, borrowing. In other words, says the Lord Jesus, don't let us be tight-fisted with our money or our possessions.

Don't let these things hold us back from being generous, especially to those who hate us and dismiss us on account of the Lord Jesus.

Instead, a willingness to sit loose to what is mine. To sit loose to what I think I deserve and what is rightly mine. All for the sake of others.

And then verse 30, the summary, the golden rule, as it's been called. As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. Now, even here in Dulwich, I am reliably informed that this is not the standard of love that is demonstrated, even at the golf club, even at the tennis club.

I mean, can you believe it? But that is what I am reliably informed. By contrast, the disciples of the Lord Jesus are to demonstrate the family likeness, the family characteristics of love at school, at work, within our wider family or group of associations, and so on.

[9 : 22] In other words, you see, rather than crossing an enemy off my prayer list, instead, I am to add them on to my prayer list. Notice, of course, that the assumption of the Lord Jesus here, throughout, is that his disciples will be public.

Publicly Christian. Publicly speaking about him. After all, chapter 6, verse 23, it's just what the Old Testament prophets did. They spoke Jesus' words.

They didn't remain silent. And Jesus' assumption is that genuine disciples will be like them. And therefore, because following Jesus is so radical, because it is so very counter-cultural, then opposition is, at times, to be expected.

And that is why here, in summary, I guess we might say, what is Jesus encouraging? Well, in the face of such hostility, he encourages weakness, and vulnerability, and generosity, and a willingness to sit loose to possessions, and my rights, and what I feel ought to be mine, or ought to be the way that things should operate.

Remember, of course, who Jesus is speaking to. In the first century, Israel was an occupied territory, followed so Jesus didn't have the protected status of an official religion. In everyday life, they would encounter soldiers who might strike them on the cheek, demand their cloak, ask for favours, whether reasonable or not.

[11:03] And, of course, as Jesus says this to his first disciples, why he has a task for them, to take the message in due time of his death and resurrection beyond the borders of Israel to the Gentiles, to those who are traditionally their enemies.

And Luke records, not only in his gospel, but especially in Acts, the enormous opposition that they would face as they do that. How much they would indeed be excluded and reviled and spurned on account of the Son of Man, a level of opposition that is normal for many across the Christian world today.

Which means, of course, I take it that as our culture becomes more and more hostile to genuine Christianity, as the religious establishment perhaps becomes more and more hostile to those whose confidence is in the foundation of the Apostles' teaching, why I take it that will provide greater and greater opportunity for us to demonstrate this kind of love, this family love, but a very, very radical kind of love to show the family likeness.

Love your enemies. But secondly, what about? Because that's what we're thinking, isn't it? I mean, it's what I'm thinking.

Jesus, surely this is all a bit, I mean, it's kind of fine on paper, but surely in practice, isn't it just a bit naive? I mean, especially in my, whatever, in my school, you might be thinking, or my workplace, or my wider family, or, you know, with the people I know I'm going to be meeting this coming week.

[12:55] And we expect, I think, Jesus to qualify what he says, for there to be lots of kind of small print and sub-clauses, which provide us with the exceptions which we imagine are only reasonable.

Well, as so often, the Lord Jesus anticipates our responses. He knows and understands human nature, and there are no sub-clauses and small prints.

Because his very point, really, is that the world's standard of love is actually very unremarkable. very unremarkable. And by contrast, the standard of love for Jesus' disciples is to be radically different.

All too often, I guess, we hear Jesus talking about love. And perhaps, you know, I can almost sort of hear myself doing this, really. Perhaps sort of subconsciously, we think to ourselves, yeah, yeah, you know, tell me something new.

But this is new. This is not a kind of bland, superficial niceness that so easily passes as love. It is a very different kind of love to the world's love.

[14:09] Notice, will you, how in verse 32 to 34, the Lord Jesus says the same thing, but in three different situations. Verse 32, if you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you?

For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you?

Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amounts. Reciprocity was the underlying ethic in much of the first century Roman world, as I guess it is today.

You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours. At work, we all know, don't we, there's no such thing as a free lunch, or a free trip to the opera, or the rugby, or the cricket, or whatever it is.

It is, I guess you might say, the Christmas card test. You see, who are you going to send your Christmas cards to this year? Perhaps some of you have done that already, you're ahead of the game.

[15:14] Perhaps others are just thinking about it. Well, are you simply going to send Christmas cards to people who you sent Christmas cards to last year? Because they sent Christmas cards to you the year before.

But then what about her? I mean, she didn't send one last year, but she did send one the year before. So, I mean, do we kind of give her the benefit of the doubt and send her one this year? Or what about him? I mean, you know, he didn't send one at all last year, or the year before, or the year before, so perhaps we'll scratch him out altogether. And then, of course, the whole thing goes badly wrong, doesn't it, on Christmas Eve? Because suddenly, on Christmas Eve, you get a whole pile of Christmas cards from people who actually you struck off the list.

Verse 34, what credit is that to you? It is just behaving like the world. It begs the question, doesn't it, do we love more than the world loves?

I guess it's worth asking that question even at the very kind of basic level of church family and the way in which we relate to each other as a church family. Do we only love those who reciprocate, those who make us feel good about ourselves, those who are generous towards us, those who we click with?

[16:31] What about those who don't have the resources, or those we find irritating, or tiresome, or demanding? But as we've seen, the context is opposition from the world.

And I imagine that broadly speaking, that we sort of divide into two groups on this. I imagine there'll be some of us who actually, we have tried to live like this, and we've got hurt, and we've lost out. It's costly. At which point, of course, the great temptation is to say to ourselves, I'm not going to get myself in that situation again.

It's just too painful. I'm going to avoid those difficult people and those potentially tricky situations. I'll avoid circumstances of confrontation for being a Christian.

I'm just going to keep quiet. But I guess the other group is those actually who haven't begun to live like this, because we know it will be costly.

[17:34] perhaps some of us naturally more people-pleasers than others, naturally want to be accepted by others more. We naturally tend to avoid tricky people in difficult situations.

We tend not to speak up as a Christian. We don't engage with that particular person. We tend naturally only to mix with those who love us and affirm us. Well, I don't know which of those two groups you are in, but I guess whichever one we are in, it begs the question, doesn't it, how? How do I find the resources to love like this? Well, that's our third point. Because I don't know about you, but when I am wronged, my instinct is not to love.

There's a kind of inner lawyer hidden for some of the time, but nonetheless quick to jump into action, quick to jump to my defense and to establish the rightness of my cause and the next steps that need to be taken, all aimed at guarding my particular corner.

So, how do we find the resources to love like this? Well, this final point is the most important of the talk, so if you have drifted off, then come back, please, because the Lord Jesus shows us the engine, the engine which will drive this kind of love, without which our love will only ever be the kind of love that the world shows.

[19:15] Two perspectives. First of all, the future perspective. Verse 35, 5, but love your enemies and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return and your reward will be great and you'll be sons of the Most High.

Jesus talks about rewards, just as back in 623, the Lord Jesus focused his disciples on the future in the face of opposition and hatred.

623, rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven, for so their fathers did to the prophets. God rewards in full measure those who demonstrate the family likeness, the father's character.

I don't think we should be nervous of the language of reward. It's not about earning your way to heaven. It is simply about God rewarding faithfulness. There is a future day of justice.

Last Sunday, this may well have passed you by as it did to me, but I think probably not to millions of others, was the start of the 17th series of the reality TV show I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here.

[20:33] Once again, it's being hosted by Ant and Dec, who back in Australia were their 10 contestants, including, I gather, Stanley Johnson at the age of 77. They have no luxuries.

They have to endure daily trials, which often consist of being confined into small places or having bugs thrown over them or having to eat bugs or creepy crawlies or whatever it is.

Now, I don't know about you, I can't think of anything worse. And I think for me, at least, the obvious question to ask is, why on earth would you want to do that? What keeps them going in the midst of it?

I realise there's a kind of publicity element, and basically they're all after publicity, but that doesn't work for the illustrations, you've got to leave that for one side. There's a prize.

They are all looking for the prize in the future, the crown being king or queen of the jungle. In a far greater way, says the Lord Jesus, there is a future perspective of heaven, of reward, of wrongs being righted.

[21 : 44] That is the engine which is to drive this kind of radical love. So, imagine, in the workplace, you decide you're going to be a public Christian, living distinctively, speaking distinctively, seeking to demonstrate this kind of radical love to others.

There may be a loss of reputation, there may be a sense of times where you feel you're having to put your job on the line, but if you are certain of the new creation of heaven, then actually, I take it, you won't mind losing out in the present.

Do you see how our willingness to live like this, to love like this, it reveals what we are ultimately living for. Am I ultimately living for and striving after worldly success and worldly security?

Or actually, verse 35, I got my sights firmly fixed on heaven and on heavenly reward. Or just think of that neighbor or acquaintance who rarely has a good word for you because you're a follower of the Lord Jesus.

Again, I take it, it is this future perspective which will enable us to pray for them, to speak well of them, to engage with them, rather than just to withdraw and say to ourselves, do you know what?

[23 : 16] I'm not going to have anything to do with them. They're too much like hard work. If we're living for this world, we'll just find them too costly, too inconvenient.

Jesus' teaching is very simple, isn't it? But I take it, it is immensely challenging. Secondly, the mercy perspective.

End of verse 35. He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your father is merciful. The point here, very simply, is that God is a God who doesn't operate on the basis of reciprocal relationships.

He doesn't stretch our backs because we've stretched his. He is merciful. He gives to the undeserving. He gives freely to the ungrateful. He is gracious even to the wicked.

And as those who know his mercy, then we demonstrate the family likeness as we love our enemies. spirits. Now, I too have a book I can talk about this morning.

[24 : 28] I haven't brought it with me, but it's called In Japan, The Cricket's Cry. It's a curious title, but it tells the story of Steve Metcalf, who was the son of missionaries living in China in the 1930s, and he was sent to an internment camp along with his family when Japan invaded China in 1937.

The conditions were terrible. They suffered brutality at the hands of the guards. But one of the other prisoners, which is the thing that really interested me, was Eric Liddell, the Olympic sprinter, who himself had gone to China as a missionary.

He gave Steve his running shoes, and this is where Steve picks up the story. This is what he writes. Much as I would have sat for hours listening to Eric, his modesty meant he rarely talked about his own achievements.

He did, however, impart the greatest challenge of my life. You should pray for the Japanese. Was it really possible to pray for the men who had incarcerated us in this wretched prison and stood guard over us with guns?

For the jailers who kept me apart from my family? Well, as you go through the book, you discover that painfully and reluctantly, he found that he could.

[25 : 46] And so at the end of the war, he went back to Japan as a missionary, and he stayed there for many, many years. You see, the point is that when we find it hard to love others, to demonstrate this radical family love, Christian love to others, actually we need to preach God's mercy to ourselves.

Verse 35, I am an ungrateful, evil person, and yet God is merciful to me. We were lost, and he sent his son into the world to seek and to save us.

We were ungrateful, and yet Jesus bore this thankless task alone as he hung on the cross for our sins, sparing the punishment for us.

So many of us in this room, we are Gentiles, and yet Jesus rose from the dead, and he sent his disciples to us. We were God's enemies, yet see, just see how he loved us.

I think that's the link with verses 37 to 38, that heading put in by the editors judging others is, well, it's just put in by the editors, and this one is not particularly helpful. Verse 37, judge not, and you will

not be judged.

[27 : 15] Condemn not, and you'll not be condemned. Forgive, and you'll be forgiven. So often, our response to opposition and exclusion is that we resort to a kind of judgmental, condemning spirit.

Now, Jesus isn't saying here, don't be discerning, far from it, as we will see next week. Rather, it is a warning against the kind of finger-wagging judgmentalism, becoming a moral policeman, like, who's that guy in the Paddington films, Mr.

Curry, isn't it? It's very unattractive, the very things that so often puts people off the Christian message. Instead, we preach to ourselves the message of God's mercy.

Now, I take it that one of the things our secular culture still values is Jesus' teaching on love.

I take it that in a sense, our secular culture might hear this reading this morning and say, yes, three cheers for Jesus. Verse 27, love your enemies. Yes, that's a good thing.

[28 : 23] Verse 32, don't just love those who love you. Yes, that's a good thing. Verse 37, forgive and you'll be forgiven. Yes, we like that. We want society as a whole to be like this, to demonstrate this kind of love.

But of course, the irony is that our secular culture robs us of the engines that drive this kind of love.

A future beyond this world, a new creation, when you can't believe in that kind of stuff anymore.

Jesus, who died on the cross for ungrateful wicked sinners. We don't want to hear that.

Which means, of course, as our culture drifts further and further away from its Christian moorings, actually this kind of love will become less and less common.

And the opportunities that we have to demonstrate it will become more and more frequent. and so as we demonstrate the mercy of God towards others, we are demonstrating the wonderful kindness and character of God himself.

[29 : 34] We are at his showcases for his love and kindness. moments. Why don't we have a few moments quiet, I shall then pray, and then we can have time for questions.

for he is kind to the ungrateful and evil.

people. Heavenly Father, we tell you that we are by nature ungrateful and evil people. We praise you therefore for your great kindness to us.

We thank you that Lord Jesus came, not for the spiritually healthy, but the spiritually sick. He came to seek and to save the lost. Christ. And we pray, Heavenly Father, we would be transformed ourselves by this glorious gospel.

And especially in terms of how we relate to and love others in a culture which is so often apathetic or worse, hostile to the claims of the Lord Jesus.

[30 : 56] Pray that we would indeed be those who would demonstrate this mercy and have our eyes firmly fixed. on our heavenly reward. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.