

The Freedom To Hate

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[0 : 00] I feel like an astronaut about to take off here, yeah. Looking at this passage, which has the predominant word hate in it, and the title of the talk that it's about the freedom to hate, and I think that I won't explain that to you just yet, but allow you to work on it a bit as you listen.

I'm fascinated, as no doubt you are, by the hockey player strike. When I was a young man in the ministry, my father was a lawyer in Toronto, and he was, of course, among his acquaintances was Conn Smythe of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

And so in order to make my view of the world, to correct it a little, when my father figured I was getting too religious, he would take me out to lunch with Conn Smythe, and Conn Smythe would give me the benefit of his theological understanding of the world, which was largely summed up in, as you sow, so shall you reap.

And he was a pretty good reaper, so I guess he was a good sower, I don't know. But he used to tell wonderful stories about going to New York for a meeting of the NHL, then stopping off in Montreal and going to the races, and betting a lot of money on a horse, and winning a lot of, getting a substantial purse, and then buying a new hockey player, and taking it back to Toronto.

I think this was the story of Buescher Jackson, if you remember him, how he came to be at Toronto Maple Leaf. Well, life was relatively simple in those days for hockey players and managers, and there's a lot of personal contact, and he was a pretty autocratic character as an owner of the Leafs.

[2 : 23] But now you see what you have is, you have 800 very nice guys. I mean, they must be above average personalities in every possible way.

And then you no doubt have quite a number of very successful businessmen who have accumulated a lot of wealth. But the 800 good guys and the successful businessmen do not sit down and talk to each other.

They form an organization over here, and another organization over here, and they submit to whatever those organizations tell them.

And the encounter they have is between the National Hockey League Players Union, or whatever it is, and the managers thing, and they battle it out. Now, the only reason I tell you that, and part from the fact that it's one of the great concerns of our life today, I'm sure, is that I think what the New Testament does is take the story of where we institutionally come up against each other, where we come up against each other in terms of our business loyalties, or in terms of our ethnic commitments, or in terms of, we come up against each other as one great institution which represents me, and another great institution which represents you, and they bang up against each other and try and solve the problems of the world, when in fact, if the two people involved could sit down together, that's what the New Testament is about.

It's how a player sits down and talks to a manager, so to speak. It's that kind of interpersonal honesty and directness which most of us wish could happen, but which in our business world doesn't happen.

[4 : 25] But when you start looking at the New Testament, you see that that's what does happen, that you're not allowed to hide behind your religiosity.

You're not allowed to hide behind your denominationalism. You're not allowed to hide behind your public image. You have to be a person meeting a person.

And you have to suffer both the good things that come out of that and the difficult things that come out of it. That's the encounter. And that's the kind of encounter that I think Jesus is explaining to his disciples in this very remarkable passage, which if you look at it, starts by saying, if the world hates you.

And I want to remind you that loathe, despise, long that they may burn in hell, is the kind of ingredients out of which hatred is made.

It's a very powerful word. Much too powerful a word for anybody to admit to it in our politically correct society. But the New Testament isn't afraid of saying that at the human heart, at the level of the human heart, there can be genuine hatred.

[5 : 46] And this genuine hatred, which is spoken of in verse 18, the first line on the passage you have in front of you, he says, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

In other words, that the focus of the hatred is not you. You're not really significant whether people like you or whether they hate you doesn't matter very much.

And some of you have good reason to be loved, and some of you... Maybe. I don't know. But you see, what Jesus is being careful to tell them is don't take this personally, because it isn't you they hate.

It's because they basically hate Jesus Christ, that they express that hate in relationship to you.

The world presumably has legitimate objectives of hate, but this hatred is focused on the person of Christ.

[6 : 58] You're not to become paranoid about it. And incidentally, I think one of the things you've got to say, and I want to say right at the beginning of this passage, is that this does not justify you in hating in return.

There's not a word about that in this whole passage. Nowhere are you given carte blanche to hate those who hate you. This is all building up to the fact of the cross, which was to follow a day after this was spoken, when Jesus nailed to the cross, having been scourged and beaten, and nailed to the cross, said, Father, forgive me.

This unique example of hatred, which was involved in the trial and suffering and death of Jesus Christ, was within 24 hours of this being spoken.

So Jesus was telling them, you're not to be surprised by the reality of the hatred, and you've got to know who the hatred is for.

And so he tells them. Then he goes on. Well, he tells them that that's what's going to happen. Verse 19, if you look at that, says, If you belong to the world, it would love you.

[8 : 24] One of the duties of being the minister of a congregation is that from time to time, I'm not anymore, so I don't get caught in this situation very much now, but from time to time, some notable and important person in the community passes on.

And could we have the funeral at your church? Yes. Would you lead the... All right, that's all right. So then, then they get up, you know, at the funeral and say, Our world owes a great deal to this man.

And our world really benefited by this man. And it's quite surprising how it all comes out.

But there's no kind of recognition of the fact that whatever the world owes, it can no longer pay. And that this man has gone beyond any hope of the world rewarding him for all the good things he's done.

His life is now in a different setting altogether. And when it says, if you belong to the world, and such people often do, and the world stands up and says, We loved you, and we're going to miss you.

[10 : 07] But Jesus says, Beware of when all men speak well of you. Because the difficulty is that the God who created you and the God who redeemed you in Jesus Christ is hated by the world that you live in.

Loathe, despise, and hate it. Now, I think that, I mean, I would, if I was sitting where you are, and you were standing here saying this to me, I would be ready to challenge you at this point.

But listen for a while until I think you begin to see what this hate is all about. It's, the fact that the world loves you is a very dangerous asset to have.

But then he says, The reason the world hates you is because I have chosen you out of the world.

Now, what you find out about this is that this hatred is a very strong emotion, but it is based on a totally irrational activity.

[11 : 32] In other words, this hatred is totally irrational. And the pattern of it is, the sort of prototype pattern of it is, if you remember, way back at the very beginning of the Bible, when Cain and Abel, the two brothers, came to that time in their life when they wanted to bring an offering before God, and Cain brought a lamb, sort of Cain brought the fruit of the ground and offered it to God, and Abel brought a lamb and offered it to God, because Cain was a grain farmer and Abel was a sheep farmer, so they brought what they had.

And then God made the mistake of saying, what Cain has done is not acceptable, what Abel has done is acceptable.

Now, that was unacceptable to Cain, even as the way God wants to do things is generally unacceptable to us.

See, this is where the hatred comes from. Cain hated God because God had accepted what Abel had given, and he didn't accept what he had offered.

And that hatred for God and for the decision that God made resulted in Cain and Abel going for a walk in the field and Cain picking up a rock and collapsing his brother's skull.

[13 : 07] That irrational, violent hatred and that kind of irrational, violent hatred, Jesus says, is the hatred that we have towards God.

It's a hatred because God has come along and chosen you to belong to him and the guy next to you, he hasn't chosen.

And your hatred is stirred up by that because you consider it unjust behavior, no doubt. Well, so he, Jesus says that I have chosen you out of the world and the world looks to you as a, as a kind of jilted lover looks, you know, that, how come you've left me and you've taken him?

That, that kind of thing is, is what's taken place. then Jesus goes on to say, but remember the words I spoke to you, that no servant is greater than his master.

Now, Jesus had said that only a couple of paragraph, chapters before, when he had girded himself with a towel, took a pail, and went around and washed the disciples' feet.

[14 : 27] And he said, if I, your lord and master, have done this, then you're to do it to one another. But now he uses another picture and he says, I am your master and you are my servant because people hate me, they will hate you because they persecute me, they will persecute you because you belong to me.

Don't think that you have it in yourself to deserve their persecution or their hatred. The only thing they're doing is expressing their hatred for me.

Their hatred for you is a byproduct of that. And that's how Jesus develops his teaching with these people. It's the danger, you see, that happens so often when, and I mean one of the great, I think, dangers in the whole matter of religion and even of Christian faith and churches and congregations.

The duty of the teacher is to put before people the teaching. Now, what so often happens is that the teacher puts before people the teaching, people ignore the teaching but relate to the teacher.

And that's what Jesus is saying when he says they will treat you if they persecuted me, they will persecute you if they obey my teaching, they will obey yours also.

[16 : 16] But, but you see, people, I mean, I, I think as a minister in a congregation, which is where I've spent most of my life, I think a lot of people use the minister to protect them from God so that they don't have to relate to the gospel, they don't have to relate to God's message, they just relate to the person who gives it and think that's just as good.

But, but Jesus says don't make that mistake because if, if they, if they will relate well to you but not to me, you're in trouble.

And, and you've got to make sure you don't get into that kind of trouble. So, the, what it goes on then to say in verse 21, the ultimate mystery, and it's spoken of in 21, they will treat you this way because of my name for they do not know the one who sent me.

You know, you know, Gloria Steinem has written this great book on, I mean, I don't know if it's a great book but it's, it's called The Inner Revolution and it's a very popular number one bestseller at the moment, I think.

And, Gloria Steinem uses Jesus as an example of what a person is meant to be. But, the Jesus to whom she refers is the Jesus that she defines as portrayed by the apocryphal gospel of Thomas where it completely separates Jesus from his father and says, Jesus is just another person like you and me.

[18 : 24] A bit better, perhaps, than you and me but just like you and me. And so, you can, you can fit Jesus into your world.

but Jesus for his part if you look in the gospel of John in the New Testament says, you know, that the hatred shown to me I can disregard.

I mean, I am prepared to suffer death on the cross because I know that what we're dealing with is the demonstration to all people of the just condemnation of God because people hate God.

God interferes with their lives. Now, that's hard for us, isn't it? I think, but that's what he's saying. And he says that in verse 21, he says, they will treat you this way because of my name for they do not know the one who sent me.

He's saying, you can listen to my teaching, you can watch my miracle, but you cannot explain that in terms of me. And your hatred is not ultimately for me but for the one who sent me.

[19 : 43] In the same way that the disciples can say, the hatred of the world is not for me as a disciple of Jesus. It is for Jesus who in turn says it is for God.

So, in 22, he says, if I had not spoken to them, they would not be guilty. And remember, these are the people that were plotting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ at the very hour that he was meeting with and teaching his disciples at the Last Supper, which is recorded in this passage.

He says, they aren't doing this ignorantly. They know who I am. They have heard me speak daily in the temple. They have known the fact that the water's been changed to the wine, that the blind man was able to see, that the crippled man was able to walk.

They know that the 5,000 have been fed with bread. They know that Lazarus has been raised from the tomb, but they deny it all. And they categorically say, this doesn't count.

They haven't heard me. And Jesus says, about them for that reason. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty. Now, however, they have no excuse.

[21 : 05] They have no excuse because I have spoken to them. Now, the important thing about this, I think, that you need to remember is that what he's saying is that the human claim to be ignorant of God, it doesn't have a leg to stand on.

That we know who God is, we know his moral character, we know his eternal purpose, we know the reality of his creation, we know the reality of Christ having come and performed miracles in his name, we know that.

So that if we don't come to terms with God, we cannot use the excuse of pleading ignorance. He says they must acknowledge that what they are doing is willfully hiding from the encounter with God which needs to be the basis of their whole life.

They're hiding from that. And that is, in a sense, the mystery of human existence. Why do we hate God?

Why is it almost impossible to come to terms with him? He says they must explain away the miracle.

[22 : 25] They can't simply ignore the words. When in the course of counseling, you know, you have a husband and a wife who have separated from one another and you're called upon to try and effect a reconciliation and you go and talk to the wife and she says, well, I'm quite willing to be reconciled.

I don't want to get into a gender thing on this but so you have to hear it carefully. You go and ask the wife, are you willing for the marriage to be restored?

Are you willing to take him back? Are you willing to do this? Are you willing to do that? And she says, I am willing, I am willing, I am willing. And then you go to the husband and say, well, now, what's the trouble with you?

Your wife is certainly willing that you should come back. Why don't you come back? And he might give you up to 10 or 15 good reasons why he won't come back. The reason why he won't come back, he won't give to you.

And that is that he's already involved in another covenant relationship with somebody else. And that therefore, it doesn't matter how long you argue, you're not going to affect any kind of reconciliation until that covenant is broken.

[23 : 47] Now, that's exactly what Jesus is saying here. He said that you can perform miracles for them, you can teach them, you can demonstrate the grace and mercy and kindness of God, but they're already locked into another covenant.

covenant. And they won't give any ground. And they maintain an attitude of hatred towards God because of that. And so, I've shown you this before, but you know the rock with the lamb looking out from here and the shepherd standing over here with his shepherd's staff in his hand.

And this was an illustration that appeared long time ago. And this was a kind of cartoon. And it's the lamb that's there.

And the heading under it was lost? Hell no, I'm hiding. And, you know, and Jesus says that is the human condition.

We can't plea that we're lost when in fact in our hearts we know what we're doing is hiding. Well, what happens then in verse 25 is, but this is to fulfill what is written in the law, they hated me without reason.

[25 : 26] Now, you know that we pride ourselves on being reasonable or rational creatures, that we were thinking people.

But, the thing that we experience in the world is a very deep personal reluctance to admit to or submit to the claim that God has on our life and that he's made towards us in Christ.

And people who acknowledge that claim we dislike or hate because it makes us responsible to respond in the same way. And so, what this passage is saying is that the world, the world's hatred for God is explained.

Now, the world keeps the lie going that, oh, we love God. If only he would show himself, we would give ourselves to him. But the New Testament says that's a lie because God has made himself known to us and we have rejected him.

And it dates right back to Cain and Abel where Cain, having murdered his brother, and God says, where's your brother?

[26 : 49] And he says, how do I know? God? Because he doesn't want to have to come to grips with the rejection that is in his own heart.

And you see, what has to happen, what is at the heart of the gospel, is the substantial reality of the hate we have for God.

love. I mean, that's the immovable object. And the overwhelming force is the unrestricted love that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ.

So that those, the immovable, what is, these forces come together. Man's irrational rejection of God, which lies at the heart of his being, and God's unconditional love for man, which lies at the heart of his being.

And that's the mystery that Jesus is portraying for us here. He says, if the world hates you, don't be surprised, because it hated me before it ever hated you.

[28 : 08] But its real hatred is for coming to the place of submission to and accountability before God, to give this up and submit ourselves to the love that he's shown us in Christ.

So when that does happen, it is a miracle of God's grace. It's not an achievement of man's will. Let me pray. Our God, grant that as we consider this passage and think about it, you will be the God who will open to us our hearts, and that you'll give us the grace to acknowledge the hatred that is there, and with that hatred the anger and the fear and the desire for hiddenness, and that you would, by your great love for us, draw us into relationship to you in defiance of all our resistance.

us. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.