



LOVE AND HATE

SERIES: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

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John 15:12-27

34th Message

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We are in the midst of a study of the Upper Room Discourse, the record of Jesus' final words to his disciples. It is Thursday evening. In a few hours he will be arrested. In less than 24 hours he will be dead and in the grave. These were his last words to his own. I have been refreshed and encouraged in my study of this discourse to see more clearly into the heart of our Lord, into his complete understanding of our needs; to see his preparations and provision for us, and to understand more clearly how we are to bear the fruit which remains. These five chapters call us back to the things that really matter.

As I was studying our text for today, I was reminded of the *Velveteen Rabbit*, the children's book that has a great message for adults. The main character, a little stuffed rabbit, all shiny and new, is in the process of becoming "real." He wants to be more than just a toy on a shelf. As he struggles with initial feelings of uneasiness, he converses with an old, worn-out, well-used, much-loved stuffed horse:

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?" "Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real." "Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit. "Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt." "Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?" It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

I cherish the encouragement given me by our board of elders to devote my time, energy, and heart to the things that really matter in life. Like that little stuffed rabbit, I long to be real, to have an effective ministry, and to have a significant influence in people's lives.

Jesus has given us the guidelines for this. As he prepared his disciples for life apart from his visible presence, he told them everything they needed to know in order to have an effective life and ministry. In this 15th chapter of John he sets forth the fundamental priorities of life. Life from God's perspective is relationships. And in this chapter our Lord sets out how to function in the three primary relationships of life.

In the first 11 verses we have already seen that the critical relationship from which everything else flows is the Chris-

tian's relationship with his Lord. Maintaining that relationship is summarized by Jesus as "abiding in his love."

The second and third priorities are found in the remainder of chapter 15. The second most important relationship is that which Christians have with other believers. It is summarized by the key word "love." The third relationship is that which believers have to the world. As we will see, the world hates and persecutes us, but our attitude is to be one of patient witness.

First, with respect to our relationship to other believers, Jesus says (15:12):

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and {that} your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another.

Our responsibility toward other Christians is very clear: we are to love one another. Twice Jesus says this, both at the beginning and the end of the paragraph we just read. Some people are troubled by the fact that we are commanded to love. When our family was in Ireland on our Sabbatical, we had tea one Sunday afternoon with four elderly widows. They were very bright, winsome ladies who went to church regularly, but we were not sure whether they were Christians. During our conversation, one of them asked me how I felt about divorce. As I shared from the Scriptures my viewpoint, I could tell it was very much the minority opinion. One of them asked, "How can you learn how to love? You either have love or you don't have it." They had the bought the notion that love was a feeling that automatically came when one had a certain affinity for someone. That point of view, of course, limits love to those whom you are naturally drawn to.

But we can learn to love! In fact, learning to love is the supreme lesson of life! And Jesus tells us how to do it. "Love one another," he commands, "as I have loved you." Did you ever stop to think how difficult it must have been for Jesus to love the disciples? How often they disappointed him. They were selfish and hard to work with. And they were obtuse. No matter how well he taught them they couldn't get the point at times. They insulted, ignored and disobeyed him. Remember that less than an hour before he uttered these words, there were 24 dirty feet that needed washing and an argument over who was the greatest— all

this after three-and-a-half years of ministry! Jesus must have felt the temptation to be impatient and frustrated. But, as John said at the beginning of chapter 13, still he loved them to the end. And he loved them perfectly.

How did he do it? Verse 9 of our previous section tells us. It is a secret, one of God's sacred secrets. Jesus said: "As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you." There is the key to love! It is not in gritting your teeth and determining to act loving. Love flows naturally from a heart that is conscious of being loved. When Jesus had difficulty loving these men, he didn't grit his teeth and try to be nice. He began to reflect on how the Father loved him, how wonderful it was to be approved of and loved by God. He strengthened and steadied himself with the fact that the Father cherished him. That is why he went away to the hillside to pray and renew himself in the Father's love; then he could come back and endure with patience the futilities and follies of these men.

The way to love other people is to remind yourself of how much God loves you. When someone irritates you, re-view Christ's love for you. Stop and think of what the Lord did for you. He died for you. Think of how patient he is with you; how much he cares for you; how he supports you and acknowledges you as one of his own; how he tenderly provides for you. It is that well-spring of love that will enable you to love others. You can't love from a vacuum.

As we saw last week, the problem with most of us is that we have no clear picture of the God we worship. We see him through the lens of some indignity we suffered as a child, or through the bitter memory of some pastor or priest who "put the fear of God into us." We think of him as Herman Melville did, as "all brain, like a watch," with no heart at all. Perhaps you think of God as the father who battered you, shamed and abandoned you, a father who flew off the handle at the smallest slight, who never gave you the time of day.

Brennan Manning, a Catholic priest and former alcoholic, describes the love of God this way:

The only way to survive is to know that God loves me as I am and not as I should be, that He loves me beyond worthiness and unworthiness, beyond fidelity and infidelity; that He loves me in the morning sun and in the evening rain, without caution, regret, boundary, limit, or breaking point; that no matter what I do, He can't stop loving me. When I am really in conscious communion with the reality of the wild, passionate, relentless, stubborn, pursuing, tender love of Christ for me, then it's not that I have to, or I've got to, or I must, or I should, or I ought: suddenly, I want to change because I know how deeply I'm loved.

I have a good little friend, a 55-year-old nun named Mary Michael O'Shaughnessy, who has a doctorate in theology. She has a banner on her wall that says, "Today I will not should on myself." One of the wonderful results of my consciousness of God's staggering love for me as I am, is a freedom not to be who I should be or who others want me to be. I can be who I really am. And who I am is a bundle of paradoxes and contradictions: I believe and I doubt, I trust and I get discouraged, I love and I hate, I feel bad about feeling good, I feel guilty if I don't feel guilty. Aristotle said we are rational animals. I say I am an angel with an incredible capacity for beer. It is the real me that God loves. I don't have to be anyone else. For 20

years I tried to be Brother Teresa. I tried to be Francis of Assisi. I had to be a carbon copy of a great saint rather than the original God intended me to be. A black evangelical preacher from Georgia once said, "Be who you is, because if you ain't who you is, you is who you ain't."

The biggest mistake I can make is to say to God, "Lord, if I change, you will love me, won't you?" The Lord's reply is always, "Wait a minute, you've got it all wrong. You don't have to change so I'll love you; I love you so you'll change." I simply expose myself to the love that is everything and have an immense, unshakable, reckless, raging confidence that God loves me so much He'll change me and fashion me into the child that He always wanted me to be.

There is only way we can love, and that is to remind ourselves of how loved we are in God. This kind of love has to arise out of the same kind of relationship that Jesus had with the Father. That was what made it possible for him to love us. Jesus loved the disciples because God is love, and he was indwelt by his Father; he was in the Father and the Father was in him. As he yielded to that relationship, love flowed forth. It could not be otherwise, because God is love. In the same way, we are to love one another because we are in the Son and the Son is in us. Since God is love, as we yield to that relationship to the Son, love will flow from us. "We love," John says in his first letter, "because he first loved us."

Not only does Jesus command us to love and tell us how to love, he also goes on to say what love will look like when it is present. How does love, God's kind of love, manifest itself when it is worked out in life? These verses present two ways. The first is found in verse 13: "*Greater love has no man than this, than one lay down his life for his friends.*" This verse is inscribed on the grave of Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, high on a hillside overlooking Glen Eyrie, in Colorado Springs. Some of you know the story. Trotman and some young people were out for a ride in a boat and all of them were thrown into the icy water when the boat turned too sharply. One of the girls couldn't swim, and Trotman knew it. He could have saved himself, but instead he swam to find her and brought her back to the boat. Then he helped another person into the boat. By the time the panic subsided, Trotman, completely exhausted, had slipped into the water and was gone. On his headstone is inscribed this text, "*Greater love has no man than this, than one lay down his life for his friends.*"

That is how far we may have to go for a friend. That is how far our Lord went, isn't it? He laid down his life for us. That is not the normal course. Usually we are called to lay down a portion of our life for our friends. We may have to give up an evening that we have reserved for ourselves. We don't want to be bothered, but someone needs our help. We may have put aside money for something and then we discover that someone has a need. That is what it means to give up your life. And that is what love is: it is sacrifice; seeking the highest good for our brothers and sisters at our personal cost.

And that is what the Lord demonstrated for the church, whom he designates here as his "friends." We might well ask ourselves, "Who are my friends?" Jesus says, "You are my friends" — the people of God, the church. "You are My friends," says the Lord. "if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know

what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you."

Our Lord lifts us from the level of mere slaves who must obey (because it is in our best interests to do so) to people who want to obey because we have been allowed into the inner secrets of another person's life. Only with friends do we share, unloading what is on our heart. That is what a friend is for. We are much more personal and intimate with a friend than we are with a mere acquaintance. We allow friends to enter into our lives.

That is the second quality of love. *Love not only sacrifices, it shares.* Jesus says, "I cannot call you servants any longer. I have told you too much." He shared his struggles and pains with these men. In just a few minutes, he will say to Peter, James, and John, "Come with me. This sorrow is crushing me. Pray with me!" He asked them to share his struggle, his hurt. That also is a part of love. It is sharing who you are and what you feel, taking down the facades and being real with people. One man has written,

The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give His church. It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality, but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers.

And so the church becomes the friends of God because he has chosen us and opened his heart to us. I think what the Lord is saying here is, "Love me, love my friends." We don't even choose our friends; he chooses them for us. Those of you who know God through his Son, the Lord Jesus, are his friends. If you belong to Christ, and you love him, then I have to love you as well. You are Jesus' friends. I can't turn you down.

Now it isn't easy to love one another. Our Lord chooses some friends I wouldn't choose. Many of you wouldn't choose me for a friend. I know some Christians who are hard to get along with. Ray Stedman used to say,

To dwell above with saints we love,
Oh! that will be glory!
To live below with saints we know,
Well, that's another story!
That is responsibility to the church, to love.

Now we turn to the Christian's third and final relationship: our relationship to the world. Here the theme shifts from love to hatred. Jesus says:

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before [it hated] you.

If you get the cold shoulder from the world, if you feel its hostility, you're in good company, because they didn't like the Lord either. Isn't that odd? The kindest, most thoughtful man who ever lived, one who never did anyone wrong, was hated by the world, so much so that they put him to death. So Jesus says if you are experiencing hostility, remember that he felt it as well. Don't take it personally. New Christians are often surprised by the response of their friends when they share about their faith in Christ. They ex-

pect them to be excited and happy for them, but they are anything but excited and happy.

During my years of ministering with high school students I was continually reminded of this truth. I remember one girl in particular who started coming to our youth group. She was pretty wild, into partying and using alcohol and drugs. She had a friend in our group and was attracted to the qualities she saw in her life. As she came more regularly she was very responsive to truth and making much progress in her life. One day, her mother telephoned me. I was out when she called, and when I saw the message I was excited to talk to her, expecting her to be appreciative of some of the changes that were happening in her daughter's life. When I reached her she said to me, "I don't know what you are doing to my daughter, but I don't like it. I want her to have fun and enjoy life. I don't want her to be some religious fanatic." As I hung up the phone I was stunned. I opened up my Bible to Peter's words which parallel John's. He says: "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do — living in sensuality, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you."

In Isaiah 57:4, the prophet says that unbelievers will stick out their tongues at you. He actually uses that expression. They will hiss at you. That is the first thing to remember in understanding the hostility of the world. Don't be surprised. Don't take it personally. They treated Jesus that way.

Secondly, John says,

"If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

The second reason you will experience hostility is that you are a different person than you were. The world loves worldly people. If you become authentically Christian and begin to operate as Jesus did, the world is not going to like you. Some Christians, of course, deserve to be disliked by the world because of the way they live their Christian lives. They are so obnoxious, they turn everyone off. But we don't want to cause people to hate us because our arrogance, our closed-mindedness or self-righteousness. We are talking about manifesting the invisible life of Christ wherever we go. If you do nothing wrong, the world is still going to hate you, because the one unrelenting pressure of society around us is to conform, to shape up.

Jesus is saying that if we are authentically Christian, we are going to act in ways that distress people in the world. So don't be surprised by their negative reaction.

Our Lord goes on to say that the world's hatred is deep rooted, and as much as we would like, we aren't going to eliminate persecution.

"But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they

would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But {they have done this} in order that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their Law, "They hated Me without a cause."

The basic cause of their deep-rooted problem, according to Jesus, is godlessness. "They do not know Him who sent me," he says. The amazing thing is that the people he was referring to were the religious leaders of his day, men who prided themselves on their knowledge of God. But Jesus says they didn't know the real God. They were worshipping a false god.

Probably the best example of this was Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee who was to become the apostle Paul. He shared his testimony in 1 Timothy: "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief." Much of the hostility Christians face is due to the fact that people are ignorant of the real God, even though they think they know him. But Jesus says the religious leaders were without excuse because they had heard his words and seen his works

How are we to respond to the hatred of the world? Should we gather together in a Christian commune and ignore it? No! Our response is to be one of patient witness. Verse 26:

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, {that is} the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me, and you {will} bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

We learned in chapter 14 that the helper is the Holy Spirit, and he is none other than the Lord Jesus himself who has come to indwell us. Jesus says that when he comes, *he* will bear witness. In other words, the witness of the Spirit is antecedent to our witness. But we have turned that around, haven't we? We say that we witness, and then the Holy Spirit corroborates our witness. That is not what Jesus says, however. He says that the Holy Spirit goes before us to witness to a hostile world. (And next week we will look at exactly what that witness is. It consists of specific things that the Holy Spirit says to people whose hearts are not yet ready to hear the gospel.) The Spirit goes first, and our witness corroborates his. How encouraging! We don't need to

worry about the hostility of the world because the Spirit of God is speaking here and there to people, and often their opposition is nothing more than what was true in the apostle Paul's experience. Paul was on the way to Damascus to put Christians to death when the Lord appeared to him and said, "Paul, it is hard for you to kick against the goad." We get the picture of God giving Paul the goad every time he turned around, and Paul, like an ox, kicking against it. His hostility sprang from the fact that the Holy Spirit was convicting him. When the Lord appeared to him, he responded. That gives us great hope. That is what the Lord is doing out there in the world. Despite the hostility, he is speaking to people.

His witness precedes ours. "He will witness of me." He goes before us, setting up opportunities for us.

And notice that our witness is a witness to Christ. We just tell people what Christ has done for us. That is why we need to be careful about method classes in evangelism. There is nothing necessarily wrong with those (in fact we are going to do some training in evangelism in the spring), but we must never give the impression that simply memorizing a few statements makes us effective witnesses. The most compelling witness is sharing the authenticity of your relationship with Christ. And you know that the Holy Spirit has gone before you to open the way.

A couple of weeks ago I asked you to ask God to open up an opportunity to share Christ with someone. Last week, a woman told me she had prayed for an opportunity to share Christ on her campus. God had put a certain person on her heart and in a special way provided her with an opportunity to share Christ with this person. As she did so it was obvious that God had already been working in this person's heart.

That is what our Lord is saying here. He wants us to abide in him, stay close to his love, trust him, and depend on him, and out of that relationship, out of the security and strength that comes from knowing that we are loved of God and secure in him, to love each other and to share our faith with others. If we live that way we will be real, and we will have a significant ministry in our world. Abide in Christ; love your friends; witness to the world.

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