

The Jesus Who Loves & Hates

REGGIE SMITH

I hate you. Are you shocked to hear these words on *Groundwork*? We try not to use the word *hate* in our everyday language. We teach our children not to use such words because it is not a nice word. We do not like to admit that from time to time we hate. We readily associate the life of Jesus with love and we strive to emulate that Jesus. We could picture Jesus loving children and sinners and wayward people, but today on *Groundwork*, we are talking about the Jesus who loves and hates. If we only connect to the love of Jesus, then we really do not know Jesus. Hate is the other side of dealing with the Jesus we never knew. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

REGGIE SMITH

And I am Reggie Smith, and we are talking about the Jesus we never knew, and we are looking today at Matthew 23. When we look at Matthew 23, we are looking at a Jesus who is getting bad press from the scribes and the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. They were kind of your seminary teachers, your learned pastors, people who really knew the scriptures and really spent a lot of time with God; but they were also given instructions to teach the people – to teach them about God.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and the Pharisees were sort of the real committed ones; kind of the evangelical Christians of their time. They were the ones who took God's word seriously and really tried to live it out; and yet, these were the very people who were the biggest enemies of Jesus, and against whom he turns some of his sharpest, harshest, bitterest language. I mean, really, it sounds like hate speech. You know, we talk about hate crimes today...

REGGIE SMITH

That's right; that's right.

DAVE BAST

You read Matthew 23 and it sounds like Jesus is engaging in a hate crime here.

REGGIE SMITH

It sounds like Jesus is a hater in this chapter; and he does hate. He hates because what they were instructed to do was to teach the people about God – about holiness and character and about mercy and justice and goodness; and what they end up doing is only teaching themselves how to be arrogant and obstructive. Matthew kind of goes through a long list of things that just gets under Jesus' skin.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes. Well, let me read some of that. He begins by saying to the crowd... So, the crowd is there and he wants to warn them about the scribes and Pharisees, and he says: Now, they sit in Moses' seat, so they are your teachers, so you have to listen to what they say because they are teaching God's word, but do not do what they do. Do not practice... because they do not practice what they preach. He literally says that. There is that phrase. Everything they do is done for people to see. They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels

on their garments long. That is kind of like religious show in the context of Judaism. They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues. They love to be greeted with respect in the marketplace, and to have people call them: Rabbi – Pastor! Pastor!

REGGIE SMITH

That is right; bow to me! Jesus is looking at this and he is saying to himself: Are they off their rocker? Have they lost their minds? We see all of these people who are listening to them, who have been paying attention to them, and Jesus is angry. Jesus hates what he sees because what he is seeing is that their behavior is not reflecting what he would do – it is not reflecting what God is all about. Jesus says, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” Can you imagine, Jesus is angry and disgusted as he is talking to seminary professors and these learned people, He is saying to them: You guys, you’ve got it wrong. What is wrong with you? Do you know what your responsibility is?

DAVE BAST

And I think what especially angers him... So, these people are exalting themselves, but they are using the things of God in order to exalt themselves.

REGGIE SMITH

That’s right.

DAVE BAST

It is not like they are Caesar with his political power and his wealth and all that. It is not like they are part of the world. The world does things that way, Jesus said that, too: You know how it is in the world, the Gentiles lord it over others; but it shall not be so among you, he says to his disciples. So what he is saying is, in the spiritual realm, what is called for from leaders is – especially leaders – is humility; and when leaders use spiritual things in their religious position to exalt themselves, it is just hateful. It is hateful to God. I mean, have you ever thought about the things God hates? We talk about the love of God... I think maybe we should make a new bracelet: WWJH – what would Jesus hate?

REGGIE SMITH

What would Jesus hate? And we should all wear it because Jesus hates some things about us that really get in the way of us really honoring him and obeying him in a really substantive way. Jesus wants to get under our skin. He wants us to humble ourselves. The word humble in Greek actually means to bring yourself down to the ground; and that was the last thing that the teachers of the Law – the Pharisees – wanted to... They did not want anything to do with the ground; in fact, they spent most of their time trying to exalt themselves. They were blowing themselves up. They wanted to get large.

DAVE BAST

Think of it in vertical terms: The higher you put yourself, the worse you are in Jesus’ eyes, the lower you get... There is a wonderful little line from the Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan, “He that is low need fear no fall.” If you are down on the ground, you do not have to worry about tumbling because you are already there. So, get low. That is what humility means: Get low; get low. And stay there...

REGGIE SMITH

Stay there.

DAVE BAST

I am no big deal. I am nothing special. That is the kind of attitude Jesus is looking for from us, and as we go on a little bit further into this chapter, we are going to start to listen to some of the really, really hot language that he uses for these folks, as you say, to get in their grill – to try to get their attention, maybe.

REGGIE SMITH

Yes; Jesus is trying to cut and prune them back to square one where they will finally embrace fully being human.

DAVE BAST

We talked a little bit in the last program about being hard in order to be compassionate. It makes me think of a line of Shakespeare's from Hamlet: I must be cruel to be kind. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do to somebody is to jerk them up short with harsh language that even sounds like hate, but again, it is hating the sin and loving the sinner, what we were talking about before; and next on *Groundwork*, we will talk about the specific way Jesus tries to do that with these scribes and Pharisees.

Segment 2

REGGIE SMITH

You are listening to *Groundwork*. I am Reggie Smith.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and we are digging into the words of Jesus in today's program; especially the idea of love and hate; that the Jesus whom we know as love can also say things that sound an awful lot like hate, and he does hate some things. In fact, the Bible says clearly there are things God hates. I think of the verse in Isaiah in the Old Testament: I hate, I despise your solemn feasts, your assemblies, your worship. If it is hypocritical, he hates hypocrites.

REGGIE SMITH

Dave, you remind of a commercial that I have seen on TV, and this is one where they had the crash dummies, and they had these dummies that run into walls, and they run into barriers, and they...

DAVE BAST

And they put them in the car and smash the car.

REGGIE SMITH

They smash the car up.

DAVE BAST

And the dummies go...

REGGIE SMITH

Ahhhhh... and then the next thing, you hear this... Then the caption says: You can learn a lot from a dummy. I think that is what Matthew is doing right here. It is a public service announcement to all of us, saying: You can learn a lot from a hypocrite.

DAVE BAST

Yes; if you are a religious person, these words might be for you. They might be for me. I am a teacher of the Law, aren't you, Reggie?

REGGIE SMITH

Yes; yes, I am.

DAVE BAST

So, listen to the language that Jesus uses. He goes on... We read the first part of the chapter, where he talks about how they love to dress up and they appear so religious, even in their costumes. You know, the Old Testament Law said: Bind these words on your head and on your arm. So the Jews took that literally – the

more devout among them. They still do today.

REGGIE SMITH

Yes, they do.

DAVE BAST

The ultraorthodox – and they would have tassels on their garments and they would make them long so that people would be sure to see them.

REGGIE SMITH

Yes, that's right.

DAVE BAST

They stuck out under their coat, or something. So, it is all for show.

REGGIE SMITH

It is all for show.

DAVE BAST

And then Jesus kind of blasts them with a series of seven woes directed against the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees: Woe to you teachers of the Law and Pharisees; you hypocrites! And he says that seven times over: You hypocrites! You hypocrites! Woe to you, blind guides. Woe to you; you give a tenth of your spices, but you neglect the more important matters of the Law: Justice, mercy, faithfulness. Woe to you, teachers of the Law, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside it is full of greed. Woe to you, you are like whitewashed tombs. You look beautiful, you look good outwardly, but inwardly you are full of corruption – you are full of rot. And then at the end, listen to this: You snakes! You fools! You vipers! Didn't I hear Jesus earlier say do not call anyone a fool? If you do that you are in danger of hellfire? Isn't that the Sermon on the Mount?

REGGIE SMITH

I think so.

DAVE BAST

And he turns around and calls the Pharisees fools. What gives?

REGGIE SMITH

Wow! Oh, man, I think what gives is that Jesus has to get... he has to say things so loud to us to really get our attention, and he has to do it in such a way that it gets under our skin. He needed to get under their skin because they had lost it. When they used the word *woe* it was a funeral cry. Can you imagine Jesus just waving his hands and the hurt that is in his voice: Woe to you! Do you not know? This gives us a sense of Isaiah. Wow, you don't know how bad you have it; and he is trying to wake them up. They are really performing their own funeral and they don't even know it. Yet, Jesus is trying to wake them... You are heading down death row; wake up! Get yourself together.

DAVE BAST

Yes; that is a really good point, that this word *woe* carries a note of lamentation – of grief. He is not just screaming at them, although he is... I mean, it is pretty shrill; but he is weeping for them at the same time. Boy, they are dead. They do not even know it. They are blind and they think they see. They are lost and they think they are found. And I do think that part of the harshness, too, is kind of an alarm. I remember once one of the most terrifying moments of our life – my wife and I – was when our second son was a toddler and he was just kind of toddling around the house. He was probably 18 months or so, and we did not realize, but he had figured out how to open doors.

REGGIE SMITH

Oh, smart kid.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so we were sitting on the front porch one day and all of a sudden we see him in the driveway and he is toddling right straight toward the street; and we could see cars coming up the street, and we just screamed, you know. It is that kind of thing that Jesus is doing. It is lamentation for them, but it is also alarm: Watch out! Look at what you are doing.

REGGIE SMITH

Absolutely. Jesus sometimes has to rebuke us, and a lot of us never want to be rebuked. It is like being criticized; none of us like to be criticized. We all want to have nice things said about us, but what your story kind of alludes to is that it was kind of a rebuke – a warning – and a rebuke is also grace. It is the grace of God to say: I love you enough that I would rather have you angry at me, sound the alarm, save your life, than to just let you go all on your own and ruin your life. So, rebuke is grace.

DAVE BAST

I think of something you noted; we were talking about this earlier, the great C. S. Lewis. There seems to be a good C. S. Lewis quote for everything, you know; but Lewis once said that God whispers in our pleasure to us, but he shouts in our pain.

REGGIE SMITH

Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

And I think one of the ways, maybe, that Jesus still says woe to us today is through painful circumstances that he allows to come into our lives; maybe to get us to wake up. It could very well be that that is... It seems like he hates us when things don't go our way.

REGGIE SMITH

That's right.

DAVE BAST

When we cry out, when we ask for something and he says, "No," and he does not give it to us, it seems like hate, but maybe it is actually love that wants to wake us up to our true condition.

REGGIE SMITH

That's right. Pain wakes us up like nothing else; and as a pastor, I have had many people who come to me... They do not come to me when things are going well; they come to me when things are not going so well – when they have to go in for cancer treatment; when they have a son who has walked away; when they have experienced some real brokenness in their life; that is when they are moving toward Jesus; that is when they are moving toward healing; and pain very often can be a way in which we are brought to our knees – again, back to humility; that God gets ahold of us and he begins to repair our lives again.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is so easy for us to slip into a kind of superior mindset, to make assumptions about our own spiritual state or condition because we are the religious ones, you know, we are the devout ones; we are the ones who go to church; we are the ones who teach the Law; we are the ones who wear the clothes; we are the ones who are greeted with respect: Oh, Pastor. Professor. How do we remember that if it is all show, that if we are not really doing business with God on the deepest level, if we are not really humbling ourselves and getting low, that God hates all that outward stuff? He even hates our worship. I mean, that is one of the things the Bible says: What does God hate? What would Jesus hate? WWJH. He would hate it if we worshipped him without paying attention to what he calls the weightier matters of the Law here in this chapter.

REGGIE SMITH

Mercy, justice, faithfulness; those are the things that God really cares about; and how we can do those well in doing worship.

DAVE BAST

So let's turn to that next on *Groundwork*.

Segment 3

REGGIE SMITH

This is *Groundwork*. I am Reggie Smith.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

REGGIE SMITH

Jesus really wants to save our lives, and I was thinking of a story, way back when I was a little kid, and I wanted to swim. I went to the swimming pool with a friend of mine, and he jumped off the diving board and went in and touched the bottom of the pool and came back up just as straight, and swam over to the shallow side; and I said to myself: I can do that. So I went to the top of the board and I looked down and I jumped off and I tried to touch the bottom and I didn't make it; and I started panicking and thrashing my hands, and my friend saw me and he jumped in, grabbed me from behind, pulled me to the surface and took me to the side; and he said: Do you know how to swim? And I said to him: It looked easy. So, I would say I had a little bit of stupidity going on there.

DAVE BAST

Maybe a little bit of pride...

REGGIE SMITH

Just a little.

DAVE BAST

But someone was there to save you; and the bottom line about Jesus is, whatever he says and does, however hard he may sound, or even however hard he may treat us, he is the savior, and we need him, and he wants to make himself known that way. It is all done... I mean, the bedrock is love, and the hate is more on the surface to try to save us.

REGGIE SMITH

That's right. Jesus always tries to pull us back to this whole thing that we need a savior. I think about the story that is in here when Jesus talks about the blind fools, which is kind of a harsh word: blind; and it reminds me, have you ever been on the corner of a traffic light and there is a blind person standing there and the blind person says to you: I will help you over to the other side.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

REGGIE SMITH

Would you allow that person to bring you over?

DAVE BAST

Here, lead me through the traffic, will you? Well, that is the analogy that he is using with respect to the Pharisees; they are blind guides, he calls them; because these were people who claimed to know the truth and

to be able to teach it to others; so, think about this: An accountant who cannot do math. Are you going to take your taxes there? A doctor who does not know anything about medicine; are you going to go? A religious teacher who does not really know God, and the way and the truth and the life; are you going to follow that kind of person?

REGGIE SMITH

That is right.

DAVE BAST

Well, you can recognize them by their hypocrisy; they are playing a role; they are wearing a mask; that is what a hypocrite was in the ancient world; it was literally a word for an actor.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right; so what we have is spiritual academy awards that all wanted to be given out at this time; and nobody is getting... They all want to be nominees, but they are not getting the award, and Jesus is trying to wake them up to say: Do you realize how blind you are? I am the only one who can see, and I need to rip those blindfolds off your face so that you can actually see who I am and see what justice and mercy and faithfulness looks like; and maybe we need to kind of look at each three of those things.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; let's focus on those things because if you look at this chapter and you read all the woes, and I kind of touched on a few of them, and I did not read the whole chapter – it is a long chapter – but if you look at them, the things that Jesus calls out when he is calling them out – that he calls them out for – are all superficial; they are all shallow; it is all about appearance, so they look very religious; they are going to church; they show up in the services; they are very ostentatious about it; everyone knows, you know. In our culture, you know, they are the people who are never out on their lawn on Sunday; they are never washing their car or breaking these little taboos; but they never go deeper than that. They are like a whitewashed tomb; it is all just on the surface; and this business about tithing; they are so scrupulous about giving their money. So, they are making the big donations; they are making sure they give ten percent, which the Law says, and everybody knows it – even down to their little kitchen garden, where they take a tenth of all the herbs that they pick...

REGGIE SMITH

That's right; that's right.

DAVE BAST

And make sure everyone knows; but they are neglecting what God really wants. It is not that these things are bad – not that it is bad to go to church, not that it is bad to give – but what God is really looking for are three things: Justice, faithfulness, and mercy

REGGIE SMITH

Well, let's look at that first one: justice; that justice is about getting into a good fight and that you stand up for people; and Jesus was notorious... he got behind stuff like that because he had to be the one who would bring God's justice, because when people are being neglected or abused, Jesus gets in a good fight; and that is in a small way what justice is about; and what the teachers of the Law and all the other religious people forgot, they forgot justice. They were not getting into a good fight for what God saw was important.

DAVE BAST

Right: Let justice roll down, says the prophet, like the river. You know, justice... It is pretty simple, really; when you see something and you know, hey, that is not right...

REGGIE SMITH

That is not right.

DAVE BAST

That is not right, then what do you do? Turn the page of the newspaper and move on to the comics, or do you get up and say: I've got to do something; I cannot neglect justice.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right. We find a good fight to get in.

DAVE BAST

But balancing that is mercy – the idea of mercy. Nobody was more merciful than Jesus either, we have seen that. So, in a sense, it goes beyond justice, because with justice we are concerned about right and wrong and everybody getting what they deserve; with mercy it is more about...

REGGIE SMITH

It is the opposite...

DAVE BAST

Yes; what people do not deserve.

REGGIE SMITH

That is right; it pulls us back into the whole realm of grace. Grace and mercy are about you get a second chance even when you do not deserve it, or a third or a fourth or a fifth chance, because if it comes down to that we deserve it, then we really do not know, or really miss that God is the one who gives us space to mess up, and that God pulls us back into it. I love mercy and that Jesus was on the side of mercy.

DAVE BAST

Yes; do you want what you deserve, Reggie?

REGGIE SMITH

No, I don't.

DAVE BAST

I don't either. Give me mercy every time, please.

REGGIE SMITH

Amen, amen.

DAVE BAST

And then faithfulness...

REGGIE SMITH

Think about the prodigal son, who came home, and there was his father sitting there waiting for him. How many times did he do that? He was out there every day waiting for his son to come home. That is faithful, and it represents God – God is faithful. He is always there. He will never leave us nor ever forsake us. What words could ever do more for us than God's faithfulness?

DAVE BAST

Yes, and I think God's faithfulness calls for the same thing in us. To me, faithfulness means persistence; it means, like you said, the prodigal's father – it stands for God, but it is also something that he calls for in us. Could we call it stick-to-itiveness, you know? Don't drop out; don't stop; you carry on... One of the most haunting verses in the Bible comes in the Gospels where Jesus says: When the Son of Man comes will he

find faith on the earth? And what he really means is *faithfulness*. Will he still find those who are persisting – who are moving on – who are going on – who have not given up – they have not dropped out – they are still pursuing justice and mercy – they still love him – they are still witnessing to him – they are still walking with him. That is what I want to be!

REGGIE SMITH

I remember doing a funeral for a wonderful woman in my first couple of years at my church, and her favorite text was from Luke, and it says: She put her hand to the plow and she never looked back...

DAVE BAST

Never looked back...

REGGIE SMITH

Never looked back.

DAVE BAST

That is faithfulness.

REGGIE SMITH

That is faithfulness, right there.

DAVE BAST

That is what Jesus wants from us.

REGGIE SMITH

Amen.

DAVE BAST

Is it too hard? Not with him.

REGGIE SMITH

Amen.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation; and don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing, and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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