

Matthew 23 - JESUS RANTS AGAINST JEWISH LEADERS AND PROVOKES HATE AGAINST THEM

Jesus said you shall love your enemy in Matthew 5. But he said, "It is said you must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. I say love your enemy."

There is no commandment to hate so Jesus is taken to be referring to the Jews teaching hate. He blames them. This is calling them hateful and he is calling himself superior.

You don't need to love your enemy, just don't retaliate. So why did Jesus say love? Are you using what the enemy did in order to work up love for the enemy in yourself? Why? Is it a sort of reward? It is self-aggrandizement.

Jesus has long been suspected of anti-Jew hate and not only that but of a virulent type. If that suspicion is simply right then the gospel writers in reporting what he says and calling him an example are just as vile.

Jesus famously bickered all the time with Jewish religious leaders. The leader is nothing without his following so we reject the Christian lie that this was about the leaders and not the Jewish people.

A booklet trying to make out he was not a Jew hater says, "Modern scholarship has rightly emphasised Jesus' Jewishness - His attacks on the scribes and Pharisees are certainly no more vitriolic than the prophets of old berating recalcitrant Israel" - page 9, Are the Gospels Anti-Semitic? by John Redford - Catholic Truth Society. Yet if you compare the rantings of say Amos who calls the women of Samaria cows of Bashan (Amos 4:1) it is different to how Jesus speaks of and to the Jews.

In the gospel of John, Jesus says to the Jews in John 8:44

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

This is extreme hate. You may say you do what you desire but you cannot make yourself desire so if your desires are evil then you are dangerous even if the desires are controlling you. This is clear incitement to hatred and calling the Jews total liars. Moreover the notion that there is good in a bad person which is why you should love the person and hate the sin is discarded at least in relation to Satan. He is completely deceptive and bad. This does not fit the doctrine of St Paul that Satan uses the truth and mixes it with error so you can take him for a good angel. Jesus then goes on to complain that nobody is believing what he says on this subject. It is no wonder!

The same hate turns up in the earlier gospel, the gospel of Matthew.

Jesus even said in the Sermon on the Mount that the people were told to love their neighbour and hate their enemy. He says love your enemy. It is falsely imagined that Jesus is fixing Old Testament teaching here. He is not for he is clear that not a dot of it is invalid. The commentators say that he is not referring to anything in the Old Testament scriptures for they never said to hate the enemy. He is blaming the Jewish leaders for preaching hate against enemies.

He clearly hated them. They are accused without evidence of advocating hate. Where are the names places and dates? There is no evidence that any Jewish religion teacher of that time really advocated hate. Yet the leaders are all tarred with the one brush.

Accusing rivals of hate is a cynical political type move. Then as now, accusations like that were used as weapons against them. It was about making people fear and mistrust them and thus hate them. It works so well for you are the hater and you need to project the hate on them to sound convincing. You are manipulating the tendency of people to oppose those who stand for hate. What Jesus did deflected from and distracted from the hate in himself. He wanted to hide it from himself and the fools listening to him.

You cannot tell people their leaders are hateful without implying they as the ones who look up to them are not any better. Who is paying those leaders and making them leaders?

The accusation of hating enemies was very dangerous in a culture which hated the Romans. To say so publicly that the Jews advocated hate is virtually encouraging the Romans to get even harsher with them than they were. The Romans feared being hated and reacted by littering the whole country with Jewish victims of crucifixion.

Jesus anyway to virtue signal commands love. Jesus then is effectively saying that God knows the big picture and the command to kill adulterous people and so on by stoning was not an act of hate but God saw it was necessary to discipline the people for he sees what is in the heart and knows how far people will go if they get away with it.

Jesus is clearly trying to incite the Jewish leaders and their followers to hate and violence by accusing them of hate and violence. If people are told they are bad they will see no point in being good. Or they can be so fearful and angry at the accusations they may do bad things to protect themselves.

Jesus is lying against the Jewish people. Jesus lets that slip down below when he says that the scribes and Pharisees may be hypocrites but their doctrine should be followed. He is hinting that he lied about their doctrine of hate. Or another view is that he thought they advocated hate and is making it clear here that he does not really have any objection to it despite what he says publicly. If the leaders were commanding hate in the name of God or their own name such a command or doctrine is no small thing. If somebody commands hate you simply do not send disciples to them to learn!

Anyway he accused his hearers at the Sermon of listening to and following hate mongers and that can be taken as indirect and crafty anti-Semitism.

Anyway here is the chapter.

1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:

2 “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.

3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

COMMENT: Their teaching on homosexuality, tithing, animal sacrifice, priests, etc is true. They cannot be trusted as people but that does not mean the word of God that they have is to be disputed. It is simply right. This stresses how much Jesus endorsed Bible accuracy. He validated their Old Testament teaching as accurate even if there is error in the detail. At that time we should note the Jews held to the tradition that Genesis said God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for homosexuality. Nobody says it could have been their only sin but it was the sin that made God take drastic action.

4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

5 “Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;

COMMENT: Everything? That is hyper-judgemental. A mature person tries to find good in the other before trying to deal with challenging the bad in them!

6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;

7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

8 “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.

COMMENT: All brothers means all are equal. Rabbi was not an authoritarian title. Its no different from calling somebody a schoolteacher. This clearly shows that the Catholic system of priests and bishops and popes is heresy. What applies to the scribes and the Pharisees in this chapter can apply to them too.

9 And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.

10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah.

11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

13 14 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

COMMENT: Sincerity is not enough before God. False religious leaders have the power to drag the innocent down to Hell with them. We are not talking about a corrupted flock here. But a flock that thinks it is safe with God and is wrong.

15 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

COMMENT: Religious devotion no matter how strong is not enough to prove one is truly a good or holy person. This text is thinking of wayward Jews in other nations who are "converted". The leaders rarely sought non-Jew converts. The text is inciting hate against vulnerable Jews in other nations.

16 “Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’

17 You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?

COMMENT: Definitely a lie! No hypocrite could be that outrageous!

18 You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’

19 You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

20 Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

21 And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.

22 And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

COMMENT: This is an affirmation of the sacredness of the animal sacrifices. It also considers altars and Temple worship to be truly sacred. The altar makes the gift sacred. It is as if the altar is holy and the gift laid on it receives holiness from it. The idea of holiness being like an energy and not like commitment is outrageous superstition. The reasoning rejects the notion that some fake oaths are fine. It is clear that an oath is an oath and binding and there is no excuse for saying one oath is not as binding as another.

23 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

COMMENT: This is a condemnation of religious cherry-picking. The tithe did benefit others so he is saying being good is no good when you can be better.

24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

25 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

27 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.

28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

COMMENT: He sees no good in them. They are evil inside and out. They are "full" of evil ie just evil. To see a person just as their bad side is a form of hate and objectification. Turn them into objects and then people should feel it easy to kill them. The Nazis did exactly the same thing. He is clear though it is understandable for people to think the Pharisees and scribes are good.

29 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.

30 And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’

31 So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

32 Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!

COMMENT: He adopts the idea of collective responsibility. They are to blame just because they link themselves with the killers. They don't have to be personally responsible to be responsible. This doctrine says that Catholics must take a share of the blame for what their Church did.

They are to blame just because they say they are descendants! There the racism comes to the fore. If this is not racism then it is close to it. He ridicules, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' He is saying they are guilty not just because they are descendants but because they would have murdered if they could go back in a time machine. If there is a prophet today who they do not kill that does not matter. If they could they would kill those past prophets.

"Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!" This is telling them to dare to kill him. He is accusing them of being ready to kill him. He is saying violent attacks on them may be needed in defence of Jesus.

33 "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

34 Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.

COMMENT: Accusations of future violence incites those who worry about this to attack and kill the leaders in the name of protecting others. The Jews did not practice crucifixion. Please don't say that he meant the Jews would get the Romans to do it. He meant they crucify. Keep to the evidence instead of trying to read unobvious interpretations into it. This is about demonising the Jews to prepare us for the later accusation that the Jews crucified Jesus and took the blame for it. The whole people are clearly included in this condemnation for prophets come for the people not just or not even mainly leaders.

35 And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

36 Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.

COMMENT: Racism is not just about skin colour. It can be about how people with certain characteristics such as skin colour are perceived to have done terrible things. Jesus uses that racist trick here. The Jews are accused of things that happened in the distant past even the death of Abel!

37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.

38 Look, your house is left to you desolate.

39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

COMMENT: This time the object of attack is the people in Jerusalem in general.

New International Version (NIV)