



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

7 - A Time to Hate

Announcements:

3/6 @7:30 -

Prayer

3/7 @6:30 -

Grace Group

3/10 @8:30 -

Sunday School

3/10 @6:00 -

Family Night

SMALL GROUP

ICE BREAKER: What is something that drives you crazy?

READ: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

One of my commentaries notes of this passage that it was “by far the most well known, and likely the most preached” passage in all of the Book of Ecclesiastes, and for good reason. It is first and foremost a beautiful poem, with many little details that emerge the closer that we look at it. For a quick example: the word “time” appears twenty-eight (7 x 4) times in fourteen (7 x 2) pairs. Here seven marks completeness and doubling the double of that marks a complete completeness. In other words, when Solomon says “every matter” -- he really means it! The beauty here is that God is in sovereign control of all things, and he has set times for us in all things. But one of those “all things” seems to stick out a bit like a sore thumb. Are you really saying Solomon that there is a “time to hate”? What could this mean, and how do we understand this?

One of the first things to wrestle with is to ask: Is hate a bad thing? For most of us the immediate answer is something like: “Of course!” Ultimately we often treat “hate” as a bad word (usually a pretty good idea!). But a closer look at this poem might give us a different answer. As we saw above, the form and content of this poem show that God is in control of all things, and we can’t just single out one line (worse, one half of one line!) and say: that's not true here. So while clarity is needed, we should not just write this off as always a bad thing.

Normally when we think of hate we think of feelings of anger, rage, and dislike of another person or thing, in and of themselves. “I hate that person” translates into something like “I can't, and won't love, forgive, interact with, or otherwise treat that person in the way that they deserve as a person made in the image of God.” If this is what hate means, then sure, we should not ever hate. But the problem here lies not in the word hate, but rather in the way that we are using and understanding (and importantly living out) the word. Because in reality there can be a broader range of meaning. We can and should say that we hate sin (and often we attach “but love the sinner”, though that phrase is not always as helpful as we may want it to be). We can hate the broken state of the world because of sin (but we should be careful, because this too is from the hand of God!). In other words, if we are careful how, and where, it is directed, hate does not have to always be a bad thing.

DISCUSS: In what ways can we say that we “hate” things? Can we ever say that we hate not just things, but also sometimes people?

So with these thoughts in mind, I would like us to look at another difficult passage, hoping to get the full picture.

READ: Luke 14:25-33

Well here's a doozy! It might be easy to say: we hate sin. Or even we hate hurricanes, or tornados. Possibly we can get to (in a careful way) hating wicked and evil tyrants. But your own “father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters”?! What could Jesus possibly be saying here? To try and help us get to the answer, let's focus on one thing first: What is the context? More to the point is this: What is Jesus specifically talking about in this passage? Then, understanding that what Jesus means can start to become clear.

DISCUSS: So what is Jesus talking about here? In what ways does this fit in with the message of Ecclesiastes?

*For those who are not coming to Grace Group, I don't want to leave you without some sort of start of an answer. In the context Jesus is talking about being his disciple, and understanding that there will be a cost that is associated with that. And one of the costs might be that the people that are closest and most important to us will seek to prevent that. So we need to "count it all as loss". So I don't absolutely hate my family, but rather my devotion and love for Jesus is so much that **in comparison** it looks like that. Similarly I don't hate my family in and of themselves, but if they prevent me from following Christ as I should, well then I will be rid of them. Because I will forfeit everything that hinders me in that endeavor. So how do we connect this to Ecclesiastes? Sometimes it is time to love my family, and they can help and encourage me, but sometimes it is time to focus on what Christ has called me too, there is a time and a season for everything under heaven!*