

# Your Haters are My Haters

2 Thessalonians 1:4-5

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TEXT: 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5

4 Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. 5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—

The Thessalonians were finding themselves in trouble for their love of Jesus. From the start of their church, it had been a regular occurrence that leaders would be arrested and dragged from their homes. This persecution continued on. But Paul does not pity them for this. He is himself very familiar with suffering for the sake of Jesus. In fact, his life is one of endless persecution, punctuated only by short periods of freedom. All this happened because he turned to Jesus Christ in faith. Before his faith in Jesus, his life was one of political power, of competition and success among men. He was an achiever.

But upon coming to faith in Jesus, he found that holding on to the safety of the love of the people this world would be impossible. Jesus called him to follow Him. All that Jesus calls to follow Him will suffer attacks from this world. When Jesus calls us, He calls us to go “contra mundum” or “against the world.” The name of Jesus is counter to not just one or two philosophies of life, not just one or two theories of government, and not just one or two ways of living. The name of Jesus is contrary to everyone’s worldview on the planet. The name of Jesus demands instead that all worldviews bow to Him, to correct themselves by His standards, to yield. The name of Jesus is offensive at the deepest level to every human way of thinking and really to every human being.

It is impossible to follow Jesus and not find that you are on the outside of the inner circle many times over. It is impossible to follow Jesus and not find yourself at odds with friends, family, school, job, government, philosophy; why? Because He is at odds. All man is twisted and broken and so are all His thoughts. But Jesus is right and true and eternal and good. And so, when one determines to follow Jesus, there will be friction to varying degrees.

In our case, because of our unique history in America, legal persecution of Christian is limited. For this we thank God. However, the individual American Christian is given dozens of smaller areas to rebel against the world by following Christ. Each Christian will find himself coming to many crossroads, where he can see that his decision to follow Jesus is putting him at odds with others. Each time, the faithful Christian will make it a rule to follow Christ and incur the wrath of man. The phony Christian will choose to hide Jesus and seek to please man.

I learned this principle when I was almost 20 years old and called out of the world to follow Jesus. Family members who were very close to me felt that I had somehow joined a different team by coming to Christ. Not one, not 2, not 3, but 8, 9, 10 or more sought strategies to either pull me out of my Christian faith or to ridicule it or to put me in my place. As a new Christian, this was all strange to me. I expected a little more positive acceptance. I didn’t understand how I had caused such deep levels of resistance simply by believing in Christ. In truth, I caused no resistance, but it is God Himself who was being resisted, and that at the deepest levels by the ones I loved best. I would go on to learn that this wasn’t personal, but that the beef was really between them and God, and I was collateral damage. This was the way it would be.

Then I went to college and found out just how much hate for Jesus people have. I was not acquainted with thoughts systems of man, like feminism, humanism, utilitarianism, collectivism, pluralism, hedonism, etc. All these different philosophies lived in the minds of my professors. They didn't agree with each other all the time. But one thing they all had in common, they all hated the Jesus I had aligned myself with. I found myself often of the short end of the anger of professors and fellow students alike. It's not hard to see that taking on Jesus as a friend means taking all his enemies' anger directed against me.

I learned to try to stand for truth, but not make it personal. To try to be kind, try to get along. But the world would always offer me cross-roads where I'd have to choose between Jesus and them, just like my family had. One time I joined Readers Theater and tried out for a part in a play. I got the lead. Then, when reading the script, I saw that it had some sexual content that would not reflect well on Christ. So I immediately bowed out, telling the director my problem. He said he'd edit out that portion, and he did. So I stayed.

After the first night of the performance, all was well. Unfortunately, though, the author of the play was there. He was offended at the changes to his work. On the second night, an hour before the play began; he demanded that his work be presented as he wrote it. The director, the professor, and all the other members of the cast were gathered together to discuss it. I said I would not do it. The professor let me know I didn't have a choice that we had no right to change his work, artistic integrity, etc. I said that they could do it without me, but I could not. They pointed out that there were people gathering for the show. Many of them were family and friends of the cast (most of whom could have cared less one way or the other about the content). I saw the situation. I felt the pressure. I was tempted to cave. How could I be the one who cancelled the entire show? What should I do?

But I know what I had to do. Jesus said not to be ashamed of Him in this wicked generation. So there I was, telling these college students and the liberal professor who was too enlightened for anything as silly as Jesus, if we change it, I will not do it. The director said, "If he doesn't do this, we can't have a show." The professor was mad, stormed away. Everyone just looked at me and I wondered what would happen. Ten minutes later or so, he came back and lectured me for being narrow minded and forcing my values on others. Then he said that the author was not happy, but gave permission for the play to go forward as it was rather than having no play at all. Some people hated me after that. What had I ever done to them? I had made Jesus as a friend. That was my crime.

But that was not the last of it. From that time forward, there have been dozens and dozens of times when Jesus' enemies in the world forced me into difficult situations. They have happened many times at various jobs I have taken. They happen all the time. Unfortunately, being a pastor doesn't help this matter. You'd think everyone would realize that as the religious guy, you're going to be saying Jesus things and that would give you some cover from the hatred of Jesus' enemies. Not so.

There are many people, though I wish it were not so, who hate me without cause. From the time I began to pastor this has been so. It is my job to represent the point of view of Jesus from the Bible. And often, people who want to be part of a church don't really want to hear Jesus' point of view. His point of view on their personal lives, on their way of looking at life, on their way of living, is something that they are opposed to. They want to be Christians, want to be part of church, and hate me. There are people in this town who hate me. Just this week I saw someone in a public place and tried to make eye contact, tried to start a conversation, and was ignored in a way that said, "Don't even think I would lower myself to talk to you." I thought to myself, what did I do in this case? Was this my fault? After all, I sometimes make my own enemies by being a sinner, rather than just adopting Jesus' enemies. But in this case, I realized that I had always been kind, friendly, and generous with this person. The hatred was because of Jesus. Once of again, being friends of Jesus made me an enemy of someone else.

Do I like this? No. Who likes to be hated? But I am not alone. All true Christians, even in America, will have a thousand chances, a thousand crossroads, a thousand times when they will realize that their association with Jesus is about to make them an enemy. And it is in those moments we must choose Jesus. Many times, these crossroads in life come from religious people. I have many times been with other pastors or denominational leaders, etc, where standing with Jesus made me an enemy. Once, a friend and I were called to meet with a group of pastors and the state leader of the denomination we were at that time a part of. There was a document on the Bible that the denomination was considering. We were asked to give feedback. I suggested, "Why don't we put some language in there that says something about, 'we believe the Bible is infallible and inerrant in its original autograph?'" The reaction? Laughter. A knowing chuckle. Silly little pastor. "Well, I'll make a note of it, but I don't think it will happen."

Another time, I received a call from someone who wanted a memorial service done in the church building. But this person wanted her pastor to do it. Her church was a large one in Manhattan. I said that would be fine, but I needed to know that if someone else was going to do a religious service he would have to be in general agreement with the Christian faith. She assured me that he of course was. I called him. It soon became apparent that he didn't hold the Bible as tightly as we did. In fact, when he found out that we would not ordain gay relationships, he began to ridicule me for being a hater. And he was a pastor. I was making enemies of a pastor of a large influential church in Manhattan. "Jesus, you sure have a lot of enemies!" And now they are all mine.

I could have easily not asked the questions; just let them use the building, just move on. But I could not. I do not like be hated, made fun of, rejected, and gossiped about, all because of Jesus. It's bad enough when I act like a fool and bring it on myself, but when I'm actually behaving well and doing right I get all of Jesus enemies! So will you! My brothers and sisters, we cannot sell out Jesus to avoid the scorn of others. This is especially true in little things. Often, we will be given a choice to stand with Christ and be hated just a little for it. We might be tempted then to give in. We must not. What we do on the little decisions is who we really are.

#### Back to the Bible

5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering

The fact that some hate you because you love Christ, that division comes because of Jesus, is to be interpreted as evidence that you is saved. The world hates Jesus. When they hate you for His name's sake, it's because they smell Him in you! They know it's Him. Deep down, in their true selves, they know what you represent is their enemy. Remember, all of us were once enemies of God; all of us. Until He rescues us with the gift of faith to believe in His Son and be saved, we are His enemies. The world knows when the enemy is near. They will at times turn on you. Look what the Scriptures say:

2 Timothy 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

John 7:7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.

John 15:18-21 18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember

the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. 21 But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

Are you beginning to see the situation? To follow Jesus is to go against the world. The world will oppose you in any ways they are allowed. In our country, this will mostly be in personal ways. You might lose a job or a promotion. You might lose friends (you might have to choose between being popular and loving Jesus). You might get beat up at worst. You might get lied about in the paper. You might be hated for political reasons.

But if you live in other countries, it can be much worse. There are places that do not have our heritage or laws. In North Korea, the government will kill you if they find you. In Egypt, right now, they are burning down our churches. In China, they might bulldoze your house. In India, Christians have been set on fire. In the Sudan, the boys have been burned, killed; the women enslaved, raped. In Muslim lands, family members have been slain by family members. Among religious Jews, children have been disowned. This world is at war with Jesus. Those who are aligned with Jesus receive the enemies of Jesus as their own. In the midst of this situation, what advice does Jesus give? "Cheer up! Love My enemies. I do."

Matthew 5:10-12 10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

"Blessed are those," means: "something good is happening to you!" Persecuted, reviled, and lied about. Yippee! Jesus is pointing out that if you are hated on this earth because of His name, this is evidence that you are on the right side of things, that you will have eternal joy. Rejoice!

Listen, many people will not take Jesus on those terms. That's why many false teachers present a Jesus who gets along better with the world, instead of rocking the boat. Others present a Jesus who promises that instead of people hating you on account of Jesus, some sort of aura of blessing will follow you around and people of the world will all bless you. These are liars who are seeking to find a way to let others be Christians without having to have Christ's enemies. It can't be done. Let me encourage you with some more of the Bible:

Luke 8:11-13 11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.... 13 And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.

Let us not be those who fall away when the enemies of God test us.

Mark 8:38 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

There are two choices: Choose the world or choose Jesus. This is an every day decision. Some might say, "Well, I want a third choice. I'd like to just avoid the fight." You cannot. You are in the fight; for to be human is to be an enemy of God. You must make your choice. You must either remain against Him, or you must surrender and fall on your knees before Him and love Him with all your might. It is an

honor to be hated for the name of Jesus.

Acts 5:40-41 40 and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

To conclude this sermon, I must offer two bits of application to two very different audiences. First, if you have yet to surrender your life to Jesus, yet to turn away from your own sinful life and come to Jesus, I urge you to make that decision now. There is a judgment day coming and you will be punished for your sins. You will get what you are currently choosing. Currently, you are choosing to hate Jesus and not want His control in your life. You don't want Him to be in charge. If you do not turn from your rebellion against God, He will give you your wish. He will thrust you away from His presence into outer darkness. He is God. Either you join Him and have pleasures forever more or you choose to be thrust away from Him. He didn't come to earth to condemn you, but that you might be saved by what He did on a cross: He bore the rightful punishment for all the sins you have every committed. Would you be saved by Him? Or will you continue to disobey the gospel?

Second, we who are Christians, obviously, we must never be ashamed of Jesus. But how are we to view those who hate us? How are we to respond? The answer is clear: we are to love them, speak well of them, pray for them, bless them, and be kind to them. We are to be like God who loved His enemies until we turned to Him. This will put us in a vulnerable position. When you love those who hate you, you potentially enter a situation where someone is attempting to destroy you, but you are not attempting to destroy back. The easiest way to get rid of an enemy is to destroy them before they destroy you. To bless those who curse you? This doesn't always turn out so good. But it is what we are to do. Why? WE do it because really, we have no human enemies. Satan is the enemy who keeps our fellow man blind and stirs them up against Jesus. Humans are created and subject to the Judgment of their Creator. We need not seek that judgment or revenge. We are here to love those who hate God, realizing that once we hated God. We are to show them Jesus in our love for them.

Matthew 10:16-20 16 "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, 18 and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. 19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. 20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Matthew 5:44-45 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.