

Anger

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Date: 24 July 2022

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[0 : 00] So, we're going to look this morning at, go back to the book of Proverbs, which is in the Old Testament, and it is kind of the best way to describe it, maybe, is God's book of common sense.

It is a lot of wisdom that comes from God teaching us in the light of grace and in the light of His covenant, how to live in very practical ways.

So it deals with very practical stuff. So I'm just going to pick, because it's a book that is full of very short one-off sayings, it's easier to look at it in themes rather than maybe reading through a chapter of Proverbs.

And the theme this morning is anger, because the Bible is quite a lot to say about anger, and we're going to look at... Well, I'm going to pick out three Proverbs to read at the moment, and you'll see the theme coming through from that.

And then we'll kind of look at wider... There'll be quite a lot of looking at wider scripture today as well. So there's three readings, three verses from Proverbs.

[1 : 04] The first is Proverbs chapter one, which some of you may well know, and some of these Proverbs have actually come into just everyday language and everyday life for us.

Proverbs 15 verse one, which maybe will come up, there we go. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

And then the second one is Proverbs 22, verse 24, make no friendship with a man given to anger nor go to a wrathful man. And then 30, verse 33, my favorite one of my favorite verses, the whole Bible, for pressing milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood, and pressing anger produces strife.

I think in the NIV it says, twisting the nose produces strife, and I can't remember what it says, but it's slightly funnier in the NIV.

But nonetheless, it's really saying that anger can easily be provoked, and when it's provoked in the wrong way, it causes strife and division.

[2 : 16] So these are three of the Proverbs, I'll be dipping into various other verses from Proverbs, I'll mention them. Actually the NIV one is, for churning cream produces butter and twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife.

So anger is a huge subject, and I'm going to try and be practical because Proverbs is a very practical book, and it is bringing our relationship with Christ as Christians, what Christ has done for us, into a very practical realm, into the way He wants to change our heart and some of the issues that we have in our hearts.

So an anger is one of them. I want to know what you think of when you think of anger. There's lots of different things, maybe it may be injustice, maybe bad temper, which you've spoken about there, maybe scary people are being hurt, or maybe you think of the Incredible Hulk, or maybe if you're Scottish you think of Ballistic Bob from Turing the Fat, who used to just lose it after so much when they tried to open the cello tape at Christmas time and just throw in the whole room and knocking over everything because he just lost his temper.

Or maybe the film, the classic film, one of my all-time favourites, 12 Angry Men, or maybe you're immediately thinking, move towards social media, which can be so vicious with personal insults and with rage, and maybe particularly post lockdown, we've seen that spilling into society.

We've seen it in our neighbourhoods and we've seen it on our streets, increasingly. Great amount of impatience, and we see a great deal of ugliness that comes from angry hearts that spill out into our public relationships with one another.

[4 : 10] Maybe particularly today you feel affected by anger, maybe the anger of other people, maybe you've been the victim of people who have been very angry in what you regard as a very

unjust way, or maybe you yourself.

And if we're all honest, I think, and I certainly would recognise that welling up of an unrighteous anger that sometimes we experience, and we have a problem with our temper, with a problem of being in control of that.

So it's a huge sociological, I think, physiological, philosophical, theological issue, but I'm going to be mainly practical in the short time we have together.

But I think it's important to stress at the beginning about the reality of anger that God has anger.

Now, we might want to walk away from that concept, because what I'm not saying is that we have a... as a lot of people who maybe are not Christians think that we've got an angry God, a God who's capricious and full of rage and just full of wild temper.

That's not what the Bible describes a tall of God, and it's not what God is in His character. But in John 3, verse 36, we've got, not long after the very famous verse about, for God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[5 : 36] We have these words, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on Him. So the Bible often speaks about the wrath of God in terms of His anger.

And so the Bible clearly displays a God who is wrathful and angry. We sung about it in Psalm 90 and also in the hymn just before the sermon there that we sung in Christ alone.

And the Bible makes clear that God is perfect, that God is good, and He is an unchanging character. He is infinitely holy and just and loving, and He's the author of all of life, and that is His great glory.

But His anger is a reflection of His justice and of His love, of His perfection and of His holiness.

Because if you don't have perfect anger, then you can't have perfect justice or perfect love because His anger is a recognition and a response to His hatred of evil and of sin.

[6 : 55] Because evil and sin are destructive of who God is and what He has created, which is life and the world in which we live.

So it's a reflection of His justice and it's a reflection of His character. It's never moodiness, it's never capricious, it's never bad tempered, it's never a flash of heat.

It doesn't change. It's fixed. It is a fixed and rational and reasonable response to all that is dark and black and evil and sinful.

And it will always, because God is God and because He's eternal and infinite, it will always be meted out. His justice, His judgment will always be meted out on sin and on evil because sin and evil is destructive of who God is and of what He's created.

And sin and evil is destructive of us and of life and of love and of goodness. Something that usurps God and His glory and His truth and His love and His life will be judged and the consequence of all of that, and we've seen that and we know that from the progressive revelation that we have in Scripture of what our condition is, the consequences of death.

[8 : 23] So that immediately kind of brings everything that we're looking at today into our own personal space because we're all people who experience anger and no anger, but we also are people who are mortal and we all die.

And therefore dying is not just a natural thing, it is as a consequence of our sin and rebellion against God. So we have this reality of who God is.

I'll say a little bit more about that as we go on. But taking that then into what the Bible goes on to say of us as being image bearers. So we are image bearers of this God.

So anger is part of being image bearers of God, and that's important to remember. It's core to our humanity.

Every single one of us deals with and faces anger in our lives. It's something that comes from God, but it's been bruised and broken and disordered because of our sin and our rebellion against God and losing relationship with God.

[9 : 30] But that means that our anger in all its wrongness is redeemable and can be good. So I want you to remember that and just keep that with you just for the rest of the sermon.

There is something good and redeemable, or redeemable and good about anger, but we need to look at it and see it in the context of Christ and grace and the changed hearts that He works within us as believers.

But as image bearers, we get that, don't we, about anger? I hope, even if you're not a Christian today, I hope you get the fact that when we think of God and anger, that's not a bad thing because we imperfectly get that in our own anger.

We get angry when we see something that's really bad and wrong. When we are faced with injustice, anger wells up within us, and that's not a bad thing.

We recoil from evil. We are protective of good. We hate wrongdoing. Sometimes it's maybe wrongdoing in our own terms. But nonetheless, every one of us hopes that evil will be held to account, not our evil maybe, but everyone else's, especially bad, bad evil.

[10 : 45] We really want that to be taken into account. We want there to be justice. We don't want people to get off with things. We don't want evil and sin and wrongdoing in others far away from us just to be let off.

We fight out against injustice, and it does make us angry. So we do imperfectly get the whole concept of righteous anger.

But maybe what we struggle with a bit more is what God says in His Word, is that we're part of...

We're actually part of the problem as well. Not just the injustice and the evil that we see around us or in other people, but we're part of the problem.

Very single, one of us are part of the problem because by nature and by choice and by our life we want to take God's place. We want to take God's centrality and God's glory.

We want to be independent. We want to be the decision makers. We want to decide what's right and wrong. We'll decide what we'll get angry at or what we'll get happy with.

[11 : 46] And we don't want God. We don't want His perfect goodness. He's all seeing eye, exposing our hearts and our motives. No thanks. We don't want that.

We don't even necessarily want His justice and His love, naturally, because we are sinners before a holy God and we face, without Christ, without the gospel and without all of that which we'll come to look at, we face God's righteous wrath.

Because we've fallen short. I've fallen short of my own standards. How much more of a therefore fallen short of God's. And I think we can all associate with that. And as believers we recognize that and we recognize that our death in this life, a physical death is also symptomatic of a spiritual death that will separate us from God eternally under His judgment.

But sin does distort what we think and how we think about God and it's twisted and distorted so that we're angry with Him, we reject Him and we go our own way and we set our own standards.

Now that is bad news. It's really bad news. It's dreadful news. And sometimes we just recoil from sharing that with people who aren't Christians because we think, well, they're never going to turn to Jesus Christ and become Christians if they hear that kind of stuff.

[13 : 18] But it's until we see that stuff, we're never going to look for and seek out for how remarkable the good news of the gospel is and why it's such an amazing thing to trust in Jesus Christ.

Because we remind ourselves of what Jesus has done for God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him has eternal life.

So what is it that He did with regard to anger and wrath? Well, He internalized it because for us, because God knew that we could never make ourselves right.

We could never change our own hearts. We could never make ourselves pure and perfect and holy before Him. So He says, well, I'm going to have to do it on their behalf. He internalized it.

When you see the cross, what you're seeing is God internalizing His own wrath on Himself, on the person of His Son, God the Father, on the person of the Son, taking the punishment due to us so that we can be forgiven and redeemed.

[14 : 29] In the big, long words of the children's chagism, He died in our place. He was our substitute. He took our place and on the cross, it's the only...

And it's a mystery, isn't it? It's a mystery to me. I get so frustrated because I can't explain it to myself, let alone to everyone else. But what we do have is... One of the psalms speaks about the love of God and the justice of God, kiss mutually at the fruit of the cross because it's the only place where His great love for us and His great justice and wrath against our sinfulness can be dealt with because He becomes our substitute.

God takes the price. God the Son has the Father's wrath poured out on Him. So it's an internalization because of God the Son is God, God the Father is God, God the Holy Spirit is God,

the Trinity together for everyone who will believe in what Jesus has done. It's this triune decision, willing, voluntary, free, that has always been part of His unchanging plan. It was always His plan because He knew we could never make ourselves right with God. In the infinitude of His love, He's paid the price for our sins and He's taken the wrath that is due to us on Himself.

[15:54] And so we always need to... If we're looking at anger which we are this morning, we always need to see it through the lens of the gospel. So that brings us on then. In the light of the gospel and the light of what Jesus has done to say a few things, one is the anger.

We remember anger can be good when it is redeemed. Through faith and in the power of the Spirit, prayerfully, it can become more Christ-like.

And we're going to come back to that just at the end. But we recognize that in our lives as Christians as well, that sinful selfishness destroys the outworking of anger from our hearts. We've seen that in the Bible. We see it from the very beginning. That Adam and Eve, in the very beginning misdirected their anger. It should have been poured out on Satan, they poured out on God.

It was put in the wrong place. They were angry with God and sadly all of us, all of humanity, if we had stood in their place would have done exactly the same.

[17:00] And then Cain in his anger, rage kills Abel. And then Moses gets angry and murders the Egyptian. And then we have the story of Balaam and Ahab and Haman and Esau and Absalom and Jonah.

Jonah, great son of Jonah. Who does he get angry with? He gets angry at a wee shrub that comes up and then withers away, raging, raging at the shrub, raging at God for bringing up this and then taking it away, anger, out of control, temper.

And then we see the Proverbs, some of which we've read and there's some other ones about being tempered. A hot tempered person stirs up conflict. But the one who is patient calms a quarrel, Proverbs 15, 18, Proverbs 17, 17, 27.

The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint and whoever has understanding is even tempered. Proverbs 29, 22, an angry person stirs up conflict.

A hot tempered person commits many sins. So this constant recognition in the Proverbs that anger often spills out into just bad temper and being out of control and damaging other people and raging at God.

[18:12] And we also see in the New Testament there's a couple of verses which highlight anger in terms of sinful practices. So Ephesians 4.31 says, get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander and every form of malice.

We know these lists that the New Testament apostles have for our practical outworking of grace in our lives. Colossians 3, 5, 8, put to death therefore whatever belongs to earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed which is idolatry.

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. So it's interesting you've got wrath of God in the same context as our misplaced anger. You used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived, but now you must also rid yourself of all such things as these, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language from your lips.

It's all connected to a heart that's out of control, a heart that's still raging against God and raging against other people. And we see that so often that it's other people's problems, isn't it?

When our anger gets out of control, it's because someone else is to blame. Might be God, it might be our neighbor, it might be our husband or wife, it might be our colleague, but it's always someone else.

[19:34] And it always gives us a reason to be self-righteous in our anger. We know it, don't we, from experience, our irritability. How out of perspective our anger can be.

You know, we rage when we can't control the situation. The red, trafficked light. We can't control it. The time keeping. Why can't they be on time?

And we get so angry. The untidiness that we see around us in the office or whatever it is. Why can't everyone be tidy and neat like me? Or when we argue, so much of our arguing is because maybe someone says something to us and so we feel accused, we feel defensive and we get angry.

How many families in the world have stopped speaking to each other for generations over something they can't even remember the start of, or maybe over land or over inheritance?

And these things become massive or bitterness. The church, theological differences where, oh, and this is the worst one, isn't it?

[20 : 52] Or we all feel, well, God's on my side, clearly. God must be on my side because I'm a believer. And we forget that everyone else is believers and that actually God's on nobody's side. That God is God.

We become personal and vindictive with our theological differences. We take the place of God. We don't act with grace and with forgiveness and with gentleness for others. We just rage at them because they're just not like us.

No sense of our own frailty or sin, violence, drink unleashing anger and violence, low opinion of other, passive aggressiveness, manipulative anger, political anger, self-righteous anger where we take the position of judge, truthkeepers and use the anonymity of online to express our rage.

Why is that the case? Why is anger so much of an issue and so much of a problem for us, even as believers? Well, that passage we read in James was interesting because it reminds us of our motives.

And there's a couple of, there's two things from the James passage in James chapter 4 at verse 12. It said, there is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and destroy, but who are you to judge your neighbour?

[22 : 11] So part of it is because we still have a tendency to act like God and we want to take God's place so we feel justified in being angry at everyone else if they don't meet our standard.

God says, vengeance is mine. It's sinful rebellion really so often against His lordship, against His governance, against His sovereignty, against what He has brought into our lives.

It really is often saying it's, you know the Lord's prayer, Thy will be done, your will be done in heaven and on earth. But usually anger comes from the fact that we've changed that prayer and we say, my will be done.

It's about me and not about God. And if I don't get what I want, if I don't get my way, then I'll be angry. I'll be angry with others. Primarily I'll probably be angry with God because He hasn't given me what I want, what I deserve, what I ought to have.

And we miss, we're misunderstanding grace and our position as sinners deserving nothing before a holy God and yet He's poured out everything in His blessing on us.

[23 : 21] There's only one lawgiver. So we act sometimes as if we are God. And I think the other thing that James, that passage we read together earlier on, was it reflects what we truly value.

You know, what causes quarrels and what causes fights among you. It's not this, is it not this that your passions are at war within you. You desire, you do not have, so you murder, you covet, you cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel, you do not have because you do not ask.

So there's that whole thing about it reflects what we truly value. If we truly value getting somewhere on time more than anything else, if we truly value everyone respecting my opinion before everything else, if we truly value being in control, getting our own way, being at the center of our lives, even our happiness and our pleasures, even justice and goodness as I understand it, if we've displaced God from that and His Lordship, we're still battling with fundamentally selfish and proud motives.

And that's an ongoing battle in my life. And it's an ongoing battle, if we're honest, in all of our lives as Christians. But I conclude with, when we think of these motives, I conclude with the fact that as believers today, we have no excuses because grace calls us to change and empowers us to change.

We have the power of the gospel. So we're not to do what we're mostly tempted to do today to think about, I'll be a great sermon for that guy next to me.

[25 : 08] I would love them to hear that sermon. But as we read God's Word and as we hear God's Word, and as I hear it, I've got to say this is something that I have got to deal with and allow Christ's power and gentleness to transform me and deal with my anger and make it righteous.

So we've got the example of Christ. So you've got the example of Christ's physical life that we have in the gospels. He did get angry, didn't we? We see that at different times. We see him getting really angry when God's house was turned into a commercial buying and selling and was being misused. He got angry at the hypocrisy of the religious people, a great challenge for us. He got angry at His own disciples when they kept the children from coming to Him.

He got angry at these things. He never lost His temper or got angry when things were done against Him personally. He remained silent.

He forgave His enemies on the cross. As He was being crucified, He said, Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing. There was controlled perfect strength in His displays of anger.

[26 : 24] Now, I'm going to say a little bit. I hope there's not overlap this evening, but this evening our theme is meekness from the Beatitudes and that is who Christ was.

But we also see the importance of being angry well in the wider New Testament teaching. Ephesians 6, 26 says, In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you're still angry. Do not give the devil a foothold. So it says, In your anger, do not sin. So there is anger and we can be angry and not sin. It's not easy. But how do we do it?

We take our anger to God. Don't let it fester. Don't let it become selfish. Don't let the sun go down in your wrath. That's a great piece of practical advice in marriage, in relationships.

Don't let anger go undetected with if it's important enough, deal with it if it's not important enough, love covers over a multitude of sins. Recognize your motives.

[27 : 27] Be angry at wrongdoing in the right way. Now, each of us will need to work out how to do that. There's so much that is unjust, isn't it? But what are we going to do? I think we're reminded from Proverbs as well, not just to take the example of Christ and be angry well from Ephesians, but also Proverbs, the first text we read, a gentle answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs it up.

So in other words, speaking about controlling our emotions, controlling our anger, being gentle and not in a soft weak way, but in a strong way, thinking before you respond.

Now, so much of our bad temper comes from a quick fiery response, doesn't it? And we just ping out something because we're frustrated and angry. Be constructive in our dialogue.

Be patient. Be spiritually self-aware. Ask the questions. You know, when you prepare a sermon like this, you know, I'm not thinking about you guys, I'm thinking about me.

And I'm thinking, why do I get angry when I'm just coming up to a crossing that I have to get across in the car and the lights changed to red?

[28 : 38] I've got an immediate thought, okay, I'm going to amber gamble. I'm going to go through the red light because it's really important that I get through there. And if I then I realized the car in front has been law giving to the last degree and has stopped at the amber.

And so I slam on the brakes and have to stop behind him. Why am I angry? So I have to ask myself, why am I angry in that situation? Why do I rage at that situation?

And that's when we need to take God's word and allow it to soak into our hearts and say, why am I angry? Why do I feel the need to control that situation? Why am I frustrated at a law keeper when I'm tempted to be a law breaker?

I know that's a maybe an insignificant example. Maybe it's not if I went into the back of the guy because I wasn't thinking, but be spiritually self aware and also be aware of others.

Be angry while control our emotions, keep learning to love. And I think that's probably the key to everything. First Peter 4 verse 8 says, above all, love each other deeply because love covers a multitude of sins.

[29 : 47] So that means that when we recognize grace and what God has done for us, we look at other people and God differently. And we recognize that our love covers a lot of the minor issues that we would otherwise get angry at.

It's an antidote to grumbling that we spend our lives showing mercy and charity and patience and forgiveness, making moral evaluations about, is this worth getting angry about or in love and in grace?

Can I cover over this because of God's mercy towards me? You know that great passage in 1 Corinthians 13, love, it doesn't dishonor others, it's not self seeking.

It's not easily angered. It's not easily angered. So grace is not easily angered and we need to work at that. We need to grow that grace in our lives.

It's that love, I'm speaking about, it's not the love of the wrong comes, I'm not meaning that. It's that loving your enemies, those that you're angry with maybe. And we don't repay evil with evil, but we look for ways to redeem the offender and to love them and to bring them back.

[30 : 57] And last, last couple of things, get serious about prayer in terms of anger. Think again of the Lord's prayer, letting God do His will rather than us doing our own.

Recognizing that our anger has often separated us from God and also from one another and asking for forgiveness and dealing. Wrestling with God in prayer about your own heart, about my own

heart, about my struggles with anger.

If you recognize you're struggling with anger, that's a great thing. It's a great start because then you're looking for an answer and help and for change. And Christ is the only one who can deal with that and who can change your heart.

Seek His forgiveness. We're never static. Allow the surgeon's knife to cut out the cancer of sin and anger in our hearts. And lastly, be obedient.

So you've got these two verses from Ephesians and Colossians, get rid of, put to death. Get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, malice. These things that well up from within us, we can't do it on our own.

[32 : 06] We need God to help us. Put selfish anger to death, not other people metaphorically anyway in our lives. Unrighteous anger is really about changing people or situations outside of us.

And grace asks the question, why are we angry and how can I change? So if I would recommend one book, which is, would say a lot more than I've been able to say and say a lot better, it would be a book called Good and Angry, Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining and Bitterness by David Pauluson.

Really great book. If you want details about that, just let me know. But it's a much more in-depth look at this issue of our hearts and changing our hearts.

So the practical reality of the gospel touches every one of us and it touches every one of us to see our need of a Savior and the need of the only one who loves us so much that he's taken the wrath of God in our place and also loves us enough to redeem our own hearts and the anger that makes a mess of so much.

Let's pray. Father, we pray and ask that you would help us to follow you, serve you and love you. Forgive us for how often we can get really angry at tiny little things like Jonah did and justify it and be so proud and so righteous in ourselves.

[33 : 33] Forgive us for not seeing your great holiness and justice and wrath, an unpleasant concept for us in the 21st century to think that we're not in control of our own destiny but we are rather guilty before the living God yet in your great love you have paid the price in our place and simply want us to follow you.

Help us to do that. If you've been Christians for a day, a week or 40 years, help us to do that again and again and may your word challenge any who might not be Christians to think about the gospel and Jesus and the truth of God's word.

We ask it in His name. Amen.