

Gentleness

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[0 : 0 0] Well, back in the good old days when I was about 21 years old, I took a road trip and with three other young guys, we drove down Route 66 from Chicago to LA and we were all stuck in a tiny two-door Toyota Corolla that was about 15 years old and we had all our luggage and we were sleeping in the car so nobody was showering or doing anything sort of pleasant or hygienic. So it was a kind of nasty smelly experience and at one point we drove through the Mojave Desert where everything got nastier and sweatier and smellier and there was no air conditioning in this car and it was about 120 degrees outside so when you rolled down the windows for some fresh air it was just like kind of turning on a hairdryer into your face and just heating everything up even worse. And thankfully the good people of the

United States of America understood that this was kind of torture so in the desert they provided the occasional oasis which was an oasis in the American desert is like a truck stop that sells buckets of iced coke and so every couple of hours we would stop and we would drink and we would get these absolutely amazing fantastic huge buckets of iced coke with free refills and we would drink and drink and drink and it was just so refreshing and relaxing to be somewhere cool and get your quench thirst or your thirst quenched even.

I've been getting my mugs waddled up a lot lately and people were saying yesterday let's see how many times it happens when you're preaching tomorrow so that's at least number one that I've noticed. But finding a place where you can rest, relax and be refreshed is really important in life and most of us would like to think that our own home is a place where we can go and it's like an oasis, it's a place where we can be ourselves, where we can relax and rest. And yet for lots of people home isn't like that at all. I don't know if you've been following this but this is international week of fighting against domestic abuse something like that. I looked up some statistics for Scotland, there is one incident of domestic violence in Scotland every ten minutes. There are 50,000 women a year plus in Scotland who are the victims of domestic violence and they say one in five

Scottish women will be the recipient of domestic violence in their lives. So although the home should be a place of rest often it's a place of fear for wives or for children because it's a place of rage. And we find that rage occurs not just in the domestic situation in the house. We have people who suffer from work rage, people who suffer from road rage, people who suffer just general anger in every situation of life. And so one of the problems that we have in the world that we live in is a great lack of gentleness. And gentleness is what we're thinking about this morning. We've been reading together in Paul's letter to the Colossians and he's saying when Jesus sets you free he changes your life.

And this is the kind of change he brings, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. So Jesus sets you free to live a new and a different kind of life. That's what God wants for me, that the anger in my heart will be melted. And that's what God wants for you is that the anger in your heart will be melted also and replaced by gentleness. Why is there such a lack of gentleness in our hearts, in our speech, in our thoughts, in our homes, in our lives, in our world? I'll try and explain it quickly but take this route. There's a film coming out soon called The Life of Pi.

[5 : 07] I saw the trailer for it when I was at Skyfall. And apparently it's brilliant, cinematically, the visuals, the CGI is all incredible. It's based in a book by Jan Martel, The Life of Pi and it's about a boy whose nickname is Pi. He's an Indian boy who emigrates to Canada and he tells the story of his journey to Canada. But as he tells that story of his emigration, he's also telling another story which is about his spiritual journey. And he's somebody who's interested in Buddhism and Hinduism and Christianity and Islam. And in his flat in Canada, he's got various different little shrines to different gods or figures from different religions. So he's synchritising, he's mixing his worship of these different religions and he's got little idols that he comes home to worship. Now, where does the rage in our homes come from? The domestic abuse? Well, you see often when we come home, we come home and we want to bow in front of various different kinds of idols. In other words, think about your boot case at home or the shelves in your living room and you've got some idols on them. They're not little figures or anything like that, but there's things that you long for, you worship, you want to grab hold of in life. So one of the idols in our life is comfort and often at the end of a hard day, we want to come home and we want to be comfortable, we want to relax, we want to have our needs met and we want everything just to be perfect. So we want our dinner at the table just at the right time. We want the kids to be quiet, we want the house to be tidy, we want everything, the way that is most conducive to our relaxation because we've made our comfort the most important thing, we've made it an idol. Or sometimes we think our house is our castle and our kingdom where we should be in control of everything and so we get angry in the house when things aren't been done the way we want them to be done. Or we're self-righteous and condemning of others because we think I do everything around here, I'm good, I'm trying hard and the rest of you, you're not as good as me. And when we go into the house to worship our little idols of comfort, control or self-righteousness and we find that not everything has been done for our comfort or that we're not in control of all events or that people aren't as good as we think we are, then the result is anger and criticism towards those who are thwarting our desires and our will. And we put our wife down, we belittle our children and in some homes there is aggression and violence. What's the cause of this? Well of course Paul says it's a great lack of love. In verse 13 he says, don't use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love the entire law is summed up in a single command, love your neighbour as yourself. Our problem of course is that the love that reigns most often in our heart is self-love, not the love for God and for others that Paul calls us to. Don't know what you're like but I can tell you a little bit about what I'm

like and the thing is this, I can be sitting in the house, calm and jovial, one minute and then somebody says something that I think is cheeky or rude and my mood changes like that and the good humour goes and the anger appears and the bad temper comes out and the aggression. That's what I'm like when things aren't done or said the way that I want. And it's very funny, you see often I'm trying to teach my children and others that the world doesn't revolve around them all the time but the message that I give them instead is that the world revolves around me, my needs and my wants. When instead what every Christian wants to say is that the world revolves around God and yet so often that's not what we say through our behaviour and our anger. Why do I exist? Why do you exist? Why do our children exist? What are our spouses to do? Well for all of us we're here to glorify God. My life is to be lived for the glory of God and things go wrong when I think that the world is for me and my glory and my wellbeing and my happiness and that's when I get angry. When I get angry

I start putting me at the centre of my world. So that's where this lack of gentleness comes from. Who suffers from this lack of gentleness? Well when I asked that question in preparation of course the words that came to mind were from Bob Dylan which is kind of unfortunate because I don't like Bob Dylan but Bob Dylan had a song called It Ain't Me Babe. It Ain't Me You're Talking To and you may be thinking well this is not my problem. I can see it in other people but I don't see it in myself. I was reading somebody about a guy and what he did was he defined anger the way that it suited him best and we often do this so we define anger in such a way that it doesn't actually include us and this guy his friend was writing about him and he said this guy is a kind of guy who went around and about once an hour he told somebody else I'm going to rip your head off and when he was challenged about being so angry he said he wasn't angry all the time and they said well what's an angry person and the reply was well an angry guy is a guy who actually rips people's heads off you see so if you just threaten to rip a head off you're not really an angry person so he was giving a narrow definition of anger and that's the way we do it we excuse our own behaviour. Are you ever wrong? Because angry people are always right and I can tell you I'm always right I often say it to people I'm always right and you may do the same thing you're never wrong you're beyond criticism you're always right so it's hard to recognise sometimes our anger and our guilt in this regard that we're not gentle so I was preparing this sermon yesterday and the kids kept coming in to bother me and I just realised how irritated

I was getting with them at all the interruptions and the way the tone of my voice was changing from Mr. Mellow to Mr. Angry and the more we begin to take note of this the more you'll be shocked at yourself just how often anger bubbles to the surface in your thoughts in your words in your tone of voice in your gestures and in your action so who is it that lacks gentleness it's all of us. I want to also ask though what is gentleness like? Well the word gentle in the authorised version is translated meek sometimes it's translated humble but the general idea is of somebody who is considerate of others kind and thoughtful a gentleman considerate kind thoughtful helpful self-effacing. Jesus was gentle we know that in Matthew chapter 11 so let's look up a few verses of Matthew just to kind of alter the pace for you a little bit so look up Matthew's Gospel if you've got a Bible in front of you and go to Matthew chapter 11 verse 20 29. Matthew 11 verse 29 Jesus says come to me for rest this is page 977 if you've got one of our Bibles come to me I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me why for I am gentle and humble in heart you will find rest for your souls. If you look further down the page on the right hand column you can see Matthew chapter 12 verse 20 about the gentleness of Jesus a bruised reed he will not break a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. Then turn over a few pages to Matthew chapter 21 at verse 5 that's on page 988 and it says say to the daughter of Zion this is Jesus entering into

Jerusalem in triumph shortly before his crucifixion say to the daughter of Zion see your King comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey on a colt the full of a donkey your King comes to you gentle riding on a donkey Jesus is a different kind of King who conquers not with violence but with humility and with love so there is a great gentleness in the character of Jesus a self proclaimed gentleness and an obvious gentleness you read verse 14 of chapter 21 just across the page the blind and the lame came to him at the temple and he healed them he was gentle with people he was kind thoughtful humble considerate and yet go back a couple of verses to verse 12 and we read this Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were buying and selling there he overturns he throws over the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves not so gentle he's in the temple in the middle of Jerusalem we read in the New Testament that he found a whip and drove out the livestock that was been there he's throwing tables over spreading the money running everywhere and there's an explosion of energy and not a lot of gentleness so Jesus is very gentle but not always gentle what does that say well how do we kind of reconcile the two I want to say two or three things quickly about that one Jesus was never angry because of something done to him personally all the insults all the attacks made in him all the assaults that he endured even when he has been crucified he never retaliates he never strikes back he never says a harsh word if it's against him personally here he is standing for his father's glory and honor and often he stands to protect the vulnerable in the weak so when we see anger in Jesus when we see him taking action against people it's against those who are abusing the weak and the vulnerable and exploiting them and it's against those who are dishonoring his father's glory so he protects the weak and the vulnerable and he defends his father's honor now there's something really great in this for us because it means that one we don't need to get angry when we personally are insulted or abused because when you're a Christian you're saying it's not about me I am not the center of the world it's about the glory of the Father in heaven it's his glory I care about not my reputation but secondly when we are insulted or attacked or abused we don't need to be possessed by bitterness vengeance or anger because we know that Jesus Christ is a just judge vengeance is mine says the Lord I will repay so we can leave him free to judge and to condemn and we are free to forgive and to reconcile we can leave justice and judgment to the legal process and ultimately to Jesus Christ but personally we can forgive we don't need vengeance because Christ will do everything right and the key thing we learn from Jesus

[19 : 51] is our character must be gentle just as his character was you know some of you some of you may in some situations have to restrain others if you're in the police or if you're in the military then that's part of what you do but your character must not be transformed by that process so we need to be gentle people in the home we need to be gentle Colossians chapter 3 husbands love your wives and don't be harsh with them fathers don't exasperate your children train and nurture them in the workplace in the school in the home in the church there are people who like to throw their weight about there are people who like to be aggressive to control everyone else to intimidate there are those who like to raise their voice and impose their will but God calls us in our character in our dealings with others be gentle be gentle be gentle and when people are angry towards us or critical of us what's our natural reaction well usually it's to be angry back and yet God tells us in his word a gentle answer turns away wrath and Proverbs and so meeting anger with anger leads to what Paul describes in Galatians chapter 5 he says if you keep biting and devouring each other watch out or you'll be destroyed by each other it creates a cycle of anger and bitterness and so we need to learn to listen to be gracious to be patient to be forgiving to ask in every situation where we're confronted with anger how can I honor

God in this situation how can I love this person in this situation instead of responding with anger or self-righteous bitterness so God is calling for something radical to happen in our lives how can we become gentle when there's so much anger and there is a lot of anger in us how do we deal with anger well what the wisdom of the world than the usual technique is restrain the heart restrain people that's why we've got laws and domestic abuse and domestic violence and rightly so because we know that people will do these things and so we create laws that will restrain them and cause them to think about what they're doing and to be fearful of it and the consequences so we use the law to restrain people and we use techniques to restrain our anger most famous one count to ten you know you're really angry count to ten well if it helps do count to ten but most of that then you can see is about controlling behavior controlling behavior but we want to go beyond behavior control and say what about if we had hearts that didn't need behavior control like that because they were overflowing with gentle love now so the Christian message if you're not sure about some of the things we're talking about at the heart of the Christian message is this that what what we need in life is not a change in behavior but a change in our hearts the anger uprooted and replaced by gentle love and that change in heart only comes with a change of God when you stop being God of your own life and let the Lord Jesus Christ be your God that's when heart transformation begins he's the one and he's the only one who has the power and the authority to change our hearts he's the one who created us and now we're saying he is the one who can recreate us he promises I will give you a new heart you may have seen the problem of anger in your own life over a long time and despaired of ever really changing and I'm saying she don't despair because Christ can change you gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and that means we need to crucify put to death the anger and the fits of rage that are part of the sinful nature as we see in verse 20 and we need to replace this with a selfless heart of servant love is a work of Jesus Christ and what we need is for Christ Jesus to capture our hearts to rule our hearts change our hearts so couple of things to say in that first of all Jesus died in the cross so that we could be forgiven for these very sins we're all guilty in this regard we all know the shame

of our outraged anger we know the shame of the rage that we've shown to others the bitterness that we've put in our hearts what does Jesus do when he dies in the cross well he's taking our guilt our shame he's making it his own and then he's paying the price for it in his death he takes the stain and the shame of sin and wipes it clean we read in Isaiah chapter one God's promise to Israel though your sins are like scarlet they shall be white as snow though they're red as crimson they shall be like wool he forgives he wipes clean secondly at the cross Jesus sets free from the power of sin you see we can't free ourselves from our anger so we need Jesus to free from our anger somebody wrote this the cross of Jesus changed everything Satan himself the angriest in all creation is disarmed through sacrificial humility the way to be a true human being in all its strength is now portrayed clearly in Jesus and is available through the spirit by his death Christ defeats sin and Satan and frees from their power you can be free from the addictive patterns of anger you can be free to be gentle but only if you allow Jesus to break the chains through his loving self sacrifice Jesus gives himself despite our anger towards him he looks down on us pitiful people angry little people mad that we're not in control of the world and everything else and he has mercy on us and compassion so much so that he gives his life for us that's the moment where everything changes it's the moment of revolution it's the centre point of human history and it's where you must face God at the cross what is God doing there for you at the cross why is Jesus there dying at the cross what does it say about me and about you a theologian from Croatia who wrote a lot his name is Miroslav Wolf and he saw ethnic cleansing in Croatia during the conflict there in the 1990s he saw villages burnt families annihilated women and children raped and killed and he's written a lot about what that means for our anger and how we respond with gentleness in the face of such evil and provocation and this is what he says Christ stands before the closed door of a grace resistant heart and knocks gently with a nail pierced before the anger of this world and before the anger of your heart Christ stands knocking gently with a nail pierced calling to you humbling himself in front of you pleading with you come to me for I am gentle and humble in heart

and I will give you rest Jesus is saying lay down your weapons give up fighting me and fighting everyone else let yourself be set free from anger find forgiveness for your past have the slate white clean that's what Christ offers me this morning and that's what I need to find in Christ this morning and it's what Christ offers you this morning and what you too must find in him. I'm going to conclude and say a short word of prayer that will sing our final song. Lord God of heaven and earth we pray that you will help us to look into our own hearts this morning give us understanding about the depth of sin that lurks in there often disguised as self-righteousness. Lord we are so blind to our own wrongs and so aware of everybody else's so give us grace this morning to see our sin as it really is to see ourselves as we truly are but give us grace also to see Christ as he offers us forgiveness and freedom through the cross may we indeed go to him and trust him that he will save us and change us and that we will love him and live for his glory. Amen.