

Thinking About Anger Like Jesus

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[0 : 00] All right, let's read together from Matthew chapter 5, verses 21 to 26. This is God's Word. You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder.

And whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council. And whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go.

First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

Truly I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. This is God's Holy Word. Tonight, as Cody says, we're carrying on in our series on the Sermon on the Mount.

[1 : 18] Last week we were looking at this huge claim that Jesus makes. He is sitting on top of the mountain, and he tells the crowds, he did not come to get rid of the law or the Old Testament, but he came to fulfill it.

He came, he says, to give the law meaning, to fill it full of meaning. And now tonight, we hit the first of six commands, six Old Testament commands, which we've seen before, which he now elevates and gives their full meaning to, just like he said.

So we're thinking about anger tonight, but if you have your Bibles open, you see this list from verse 21. To the end of the chapter, focused on six Old Testament commands, and Jesus says, And when he says that, he's not changing the commands.

He's not making them more difficult or harder to observe. That's not what he's doing. He's telling the people that he's talking to in his day that the law has been interpreted wrong.

He's telling the crowds, you know, you think you've got it right, focusing on the external acts, focusing on what you do. It's not that at all. It's all about the heart, and it's always been about the heart.

[2 : 35] Jesus doesn't abolish the law. He fills it with meaning. He says, this is what has always been about, the state of your heart. And why does that matter? Why does that matter?

Because that's what God sees. That's what Jesus forces us to see in the sermon. You know, one constant problem throughout the Old Testament, when you see the law being given, and you see how the people respond to it.

They become obsessed with the outward. They become obsessed with the external. And by the time we reach the book of Isaiah, what does God say? He says, their hearts are far from me. Their hearts are far from me.

Jesus comes, and he gives it its true meaning. He says, this is what the law is all about. It's about your heart. God sees it. He knows what you think, how you feel. He knows your attitude towards him.

He knows your attitude towards your neighbor. The law is all about your heart. And thinking about that has brought a lot of questions to the church throughout history.

[3 : 38] This is a really quick blanket summary. You could read forever about this. I did this week. But some commentators today, and over the last hundred years, have noticed that throughout church history, the church has, in large parts, either evaded the sermon, or become completely obsessed with it.

So some have tried to evade it by saying that, you know, these laws are only meant for certain Christians. They're meant for the super holy, the clergy. They're meant for ministers. They're meant,

you know, for Corey, not for us.

Some have come and said, well, maybe it's for Christians. It's for people in the church. But as soon as you go back to work, as soon as you go back to your family life, it doesn't apply anymore. It doesn't matter. So in that way, you know, people have come and have evaded the Sermon on the Mount. Some obsess over these verses by saying that, how Christian you are, and I think this is quite common today, how Christian you are depends on how literally you obey these commands that Jesus makes.

You can never be angry. You must always turn the other cheek. You must never swear enough. And you can see how that gives rise to, you know, certain groups and certain sects today.

[4 : 53] We want to avoid both. Jesus tells us, when you read the Sermon on the Mount, to avoid both tendencies. This sermon is part of a bigger chapter, part of a bigger section, framed by chapters 4 and 9.

And in chapters 4 and 9, Matthew uses exactly the same phrase to say that Jesus has been going about the towns and the villages, preaching about the kingdom of God.

And when he uses exactly the same phrase in chapter 4 and chapter 9, that's his way of saying that this whole section is about the kingdom of God. And one way, one way tonight, maybe we can describe, or we can describe the kingdom of God is by saying that it's the restoration of life as it's meant to be and creation, which will be completed by God out of love.

That restoration, which began when Jesus died and rose again, it is ongoing, and it will be completed at the new creation. And if you are a Christian, you know, if you have repented and believed like we were telling the kids, you are tonight a part of that restoration.

This is a long introduction, I know, but one summary for this sermon I read, it helped me think about this sermon and these six commands especially. One writer says this, In this way, the kingdom of God is the restoration of life.

[6 : 25] And it is the Sermon on the Mount which indicates the road towards this restoration. It's not opposed to life, to nature, and to the community, but in truth, it is for and in support of life.

The sermon, these six commands aren't for the elite Christian, and they're not commands that you obsess over either, but Jesus preaches to you. Jesus preaches to the church tonight, and he says, to practice the life of the new creation.

This world, this city, our lives are broken. They are messy. We are surrounded by disorder and frustration. God's ongoing work is to undo that.

It's to undo that. And we are called to partake, to be a faint picture of what is to come. So specifically, when Jesus says, don't be angry, he's not telling you tonight to be a better Christian. He's telling you your purpose in the world. He's telling you what your function is in the world. God cares about the sort of person you are. Jesus has begun this kingdom work, and he says, don't be angry.

[7 : 35] Will you support life? Jesus asks, and not be angry. So just two points on these verses. Two points thinking about anger. What is anger?

Anger, and what do you do about it? So what is anger? It's not hard to define, I don't think. You can look at a day this week probably, or a day this month, or we can easily remember a time at least where we got angry.

We can remember a moment that we became antagonizing. We became hostile towards someone in words, or even in thought. It might involve screaming, shouting.

It might involve insulting someone. It might all be in our head. It might involve a feeling of resentment that keeps on returning it.

In psychiatry, it's called a non-cooperative response. Very professional and kind way of putting it. I think it's a non-cooperative response to something that has been done or said to you.

[8 : 39] Now, I'm from the Highlands and I know there's some people here from the Highlands. And I know, I know that you know what it means to be driving on a single track road with a camper van coming towards you and it's gone past the passing place and the driver is refusing to reverse and you've got a queue forming behind you and a queue forming behind him and now the driver in that camper van doesn't see you get out and shake your fists but your passenger hears every word you say about that camper van driver.

And maybe this driver thinks everything is fine but your passenger knows you're angry. It's a non-cooperative response. What about, you know, this week, I'm trying not to think of too many

personal examples to give myself away but in the cafe, you put your order in for your lunch or your coffee or whatever it is and the one person that's working behind that counter is trying to balance three orders and you're saying, just get a move on.

Just think about my order here. Short-term examples of anger, long forgotten. What about your colleague or someone in your family, at your family gathering maybe, who says something that really hurts you, says something that angers you and you've got to see this person frequently and often, five days a week?

What if that is an ongoing pain in your relationship and your response is either verbal, you retaliate or you keep it inside but even in moments of joy, that feeling of anger, that feeling of resentment takes over, even in a moment of joy.

You remember what this person has said to you. In both short-term, long-term, verbally or mentally, we get angry and what does Jesus say in Matthew 5? He says it's devastating.

[10:31] He says it's devastating. So in verse 21, he says, you've heard it said, do not murder for you will be subject to murder.

And then he says, no, more than that, don't be angry. Do not be angry for you will be subject to judgment. What is he saying? He's saying that unrighteous, insulting, hurtful anger has the same source as murder.

That's what he's saying. He's saying you can't bring this down to whether or not you have caused physical harm. It's not as easy as that. That's what the Pharisees want to say. He says it's not as easy as that.

It comes from a heart filled with contempt for someone. If it lasts for a moment, if it lasts for months, God sees the heart.

God sees the heart. Anger comes from the same place. If you just look more precisely at the way Jesus describes anger here. In verse 22, from verse 22, there's this movement from anger to insulting to calling someone a fool.

[11:40] And a lot of commentators notice that there's not much difference between these three causes that Jesus gives us, or at least they aren't growing in intensity. In the original language, Jesus uses this word, raka, which means empty head, or we would probably say idiot today.

And compare that to a fool, which probably has something more to do with someone's character. So maybe Jesus is saying here there's a difference in the way your anger can be displayed. Maybe you're angry at someone because of the way they intellectually work things out. Maybe you're angry at someone because of their heart, their character. anger. But anger is shown in everyday typical scenarios, if we can call it that.

At the same time, in each of these three causes which aren't intensifying, these are each paired with a punishment which is intensifying. So Jesus says, anger generally results in judgment.

Whoever insults is brought before the council. If you call someone a fool, he says, your judgment is the hell of fire. Why does the punishment that Jesus describes escalate while the cause doesn't?

[12:53] Why does he speak in that way? What is it about calling someone a fool that is worse than insulting someone? Nothing. Not much anyway. And that's not a point that Jesus is making.

He's saying that there can be, there is an anger that we are liable to. And we can treat it very lightly. It can be expressed in different ways.

It can be thought or spoken. It can be harsh and hurtful. It can be light and forgotten in a moment. It can be against that driver coming towards me that I'll never see again.

It can be against my colleague who I see five days a week. But Jesus is saying when he gives you these three different causes of anger or three different ways you show anger and three different judgments, Jesus is saying that you take lightly what God takes so seriously.

That is what he's getting at. That's why the punishment of the hell of fire is so shocking when we reach that point in the passage.

[13:57] We don't expect it. He's telling us how damaging anger can be and how serious it is. What is it to be angry? It's to be antagonizing.

It's to be non-cooperative. And it's devastating because where God brings about restoration, where God promises to fix what is wrong in the world, we are going against that in our anger, in our hearts. it's helpful, I think, at this point to say something about righteous anger, something that most of us probably think we have and we probably don't show it very often if we do have it.

Jesus shows us what righteous anger is. And if you keep going in Matthew's Gospel to chapter 23, Jesus is speaking about the Pharisees and he says, these people have shut the kingdom of God in people's faces.

They've shut it up in people's faces. And then he says, you blind fools. You know, why can Jesus call the Pharisees fools? Why can he be angry?

[15:11] It's because they are convincing people that the law is about their actions. What this whole sermon is about. They're still convincing people that way.

It's about the heart Jesus came to show that, to bring out that truest meaning and the Pharisees say, no, no, it's just about what you do.

In other words, they distract people from what a true, restored, beautiful life is. They distract people from the restoration that God is doing. That's why Jesus can get angry.

He's angry at sin. That's what righteous anger is. the kingdom of God which restores what is broken, which brings about all that is good.

They shut it out. And he's angry at sin. And it's something we rarely get right. I read this example in an article earlier this week.

[16:07] It's from a Christian father talking about anger shown towards his kids. But I think we can apply it in many different ways. He says this, there is a difference between anger and my kids for the way their disobedience invites danger and shows disrespect to their mother versus anger at my kids because the real issue is that I am afraid of how their disobedience reflects on me as a dad in the public eye.

The first motive is godly. The second motive is self-centered and lacking any real concern for the good of my children. Do you get angry? And if you do is it righteous?

Or is it self-centered? The kingdom has come Jesus says. The kingdom has come and it will one day come finally. One day there will be no frustration there will be no aggravation there will be no sadness.

Are you taking part tonight in that reality which has been brought about? Are you supporting life? Are you living a kingdom life as God restores what is broken?

Or is your anger stopping you from being the person you are meant to be? Secondly, what can you do if anger is your problem?

[17:33] Jesus gives us two scenarios and again in these two scenarios he's heightening the situation. He's making them more serious as he goes along. He talks about dealing with your anger in terms of settling your case with your brother and then with an accuser.

And it seems like these two quite random these two pictures are quite random but they capture exactly what you're meant to do with anger instead of letting it simmer in the background.

In the first case we're dealing with a brother or a friend someone that we are bonded to someone that we are close to and the relationship here Jesus says is hurt by anger and Jesus says in verse 23 leave the temple leave your sacrifice behind and go and reconcile with your brother.

Leave church he says. That's how serious it is. Leave church mid service if you have to. Go home and reconcile with your brother. Make right the relationship the relationship that has been broken by anger.

What's Jesus wanting you to do? At the least he's wanting you to understand that coming to church every week coming here every week does not remove the fact that we have a moral duty.

[18:59] Coming here worshipping God is the best thing you can do in the week and yet it doesn't take away the fact that you cannot leave anger unresolved outside that door.

That's what Jesus is saying. If you're angry with someone that is near to you and that person knows it or as much as that breakdown is dependent on you Jesus says you need to heal your relationships.

Church does not substitute the need to fix it. be reconciled whether you need forgiveness or your brother does Jesus fix it. Fix it.

And the second picture it's different in that it's talking about being taken to court by an accuser. An enemy different situation it's building on the same case. If you are walking to court with your accuser you better be urgent in settling this matter quickly.

And not rashly not insincerely but properly before they throw you in jail. In the same way Jesus says be quick to reconcile be quick to mend what is broken in your relationships.

[20 : 20] Be urgent Jesus says. King Solomon he gives us one reason I have many in the Bible why we ought to be urgent. One reason I have many.

He says this in Ecclesiastes 7. Be not quick in your spirit to become angry for anger lodges in the heart. Anger left alone he's saying begins to make a home in you.

It lodges in the heart and soon an increasing amount of your relationships will be threatened by this anger which becomes more and more at home in you and which becomes something is alive more and more.

There will be more to be angry at you'll remain angrier for longer. Jesus says no settle this urgently. Settle it urgently. Don't let it happen. You're living separately he's telling the people to the way life is meant to be lived.

You're denying the restoration that God is working out. So make amends as urgently as you can. Don't even let your Sunday worship take away from that.

[21 : 33] But fix things quickly. I know that this is difficult and for some people here relationships have been broken for years.

Maybe. Anger or resentment or frustration has meant that you're relationship with your close friend or your brother is not what it used to be. And hearing Jesus say you need to fix that, it doesn't make it easy.

It doesn't make it easy at all. We open with words from Romans 5, right at the start of the service, where Paul says that we were once enemies with God.

And see that picture that Jesus gives us of walking to the court. The law is the accuser here. When we're told that we're enemies with God, the law is the accuser.

We walk on a path and the law says, you know, you've not been able to keep one of these commands. Don't be angry. Don't lust. Keep your word.

[22 : 41] We are not able to do any of it, the law says. And you know, the hell that Jesus talks about here is a reality sin. Off that.

And yet, and yet, in the court, Jesus, who is not a sinner, walks in and what does he say? He says, you'll pay every penny.

He says, you'll pay every penny. Christ was blameless. No one could point the finger. But he became sin. He walks in the courtroom and he says, he'll pay for it.

He'll pay every penny. When you think about your broken relationships and how devastating they can be, something that no one else here could even understand and something that you don't know how to deal with, do you remember tonight that Jesus came to you?

That Jesus came to you? Do you remember that through taking your punishment, through his death and rising again, he has promised to restore goodness to you and give you life as it is meant to be?

[23 : 54] Do you remember that it was your anger and my anger that put him on the cross in the first place? The cry to free Barabbas and the cry to put Jesus on the cross was my angry cry.

It was because my sin that he went there. That's how far God has gone to reconcile you with him. Jesus doesn't reconcile with you or with me through a conversation.

No, he reconciles with us through death, his own death. Do you believe that though you stand accused, Jesus paid the cost for your anger and for mine?

Have you trusted in him for that? And if you have, will you take part? Will you take part in that restoration? If you're a Christian, will you live out your kingdom life?

Will you support life and not be angry? Just to finish, a few things we can think about, a few things we can do this week maybe.

[25 : 06] Ask yourself the hard questions. You know, when I get angry, is my anger righteous? Righteous? Am I angry at this because, you know, it's done directly against God and his restoration?

Or am I angry because it's upsetting me? And because it offends me or my needs? Is my anger slow to appear? Is it quick to disappear?

How often, you know, how often does the Bible say to be slow to anger? Is that really, really the case for me? Ask the hard questions. Anger, anger can be hard to deal with for some and others.

Some people rarely get angry, for some, you know, it's a bit more natural and it's a habit that needs to be worked out of. One thing to do, to gradually work yourself out of an angry heart, is pursue love in your relationships.

no matter how long or how short the encounter. You know, ask, how can I love this person? How can I interact with this person in a way that is good for them?

[26 : 25] Maybe anger is what defines that current relationship. Settle it, Jesus says. Settle it. And pursue love in your relationships.

relationships. Imitate your God who went to the cross for you. And lastly, one more thing. Remember you have a kingdom life.

You have a kingdom life if you're a Christian. It's not about being a better Christian. It's just about living the life you've been given. Will you pursue restoration?

Will you pursue what Jesus has died for? Will you support life and not be angry? Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your word. It's difficult, Lord. We acknowledge that when we are so quick to become angry, when it becomes a part of who we are.

[27 : 24] We ask tonight, Lord, that by the Holy Spirit, by his strength, by his power, we would become less and less angry in our day-to-day lives, whether it be short-term encounters, whether it be with our brothers and our friends, where relationships have been so hard.

Lord, we thank you that even despite our angry cries, yet Jesus walks into the courtroom and he says he'll pay every penny to be reconciled to us. We thank you for his sacrifice.

Help us to reflect on that, we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.