



Sermon on the Mount: An Invitation to New Creation

Session 4 “Anger”

If you turn on the news, not a day passes where we do not see the effects of explosive anger in our world. School shootings, racial tensions, and terrorist attacks have sadly become a frightening part of the daily landscape. In these instances, it's easy for us to jump on board with the way Jesus pairs anger with the commandment not to murder. There are so many examples where we see violence stemming from anger that grows like cancer. However, Jesus' examples in the Sermon on the Mount might hit a little closer to home than we'd like: "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment." Anyone ever been angry with a sibling? Or a close friend? Jesus also says, that anyone who yells insulting words at a brother or sister will be "in danger of the fire of hell." What is going on here? "Raca" was an Aramaic term of contempt that insulted someone's intelligence. The Greek word more translated as "fool" had more of a connotation of insulting one's character, kind of like calling someone a "scoundrel." Jesus reminds us that all words vented in anger, words that wound and harm people "are tantamount to murder in God's sight."¹ Jesus takes even repressed anger, or the bitterness we have towards others, so seriously that he says it is better to stop a worship service and go make amends. My guess is that these words cause most of us pause as we reflect on our own lives.

While many of us have spoken words we regret, and perhaps have harbored bitterness towards someone that we may still need to reconcile with, Jesus' words offer us a hopeful vision. Through Jesus, there is a better way to live. There is a way to "settle matters quickly" before they get out of control. There is a way that de-escalates anger and heals relationships. Jesus offers a new way of living that comes from a changed heart. We see throughout the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus came to change us from the inside out, and live his life through us. He wants to give us a new heart that beats like his. A heart that is eager to forgive. A heart that gives up one's need to be right. A heart that is willing to repent when we've made a mistake. A heart that longs to use our words to bless and not wound. A heart that is willing to take that first step difficult step to reconcile with someone.

¹John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 84-85.

Matthew 5:21-26

21 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

25 “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

“Whenever we encounter that which we believe to be unrighteous, unkind or unjust, we experience anger. I believe that in God’s design this anger is to motivate us to take positive, loving action to seek to set the wrong right; and where there has been a relationship, to restore the relationship with the wrongdoer. Anger is not designed to stimulate us to do destructive things to the people who may have wronged us, nor does it give us license to say or do destructive things to our neighbors. Anger’s fundamental purpose is to motivate us to positive, loving action that will leave things better than we found them.”

-- Gary Chapman, *Anger: Handling A Powerful Emotion in a Healthy Way*, 26-27.

Questions for Discussion

1. What stood out to you, encouraged you or challenged you from this past Sunday’s sermon?
2. How do Jesus’ words about anger build upon the previous understanding of the law? As you read Matthew 5:21-22, how does it help clarify what Jesus meant when he said he came to “fulfill the law” in Matthew 5:17?
3. Ephesians 4:26-27 demonstrates that it is possible to be angry without sinning. How would you describe the difference between healthy or righteous anger and the type of anger that Jesus is addressing in the Sermon on the Mount?
4. What are some of the ramifications of unchecked anger in the world? How do Jesus’ words actually de-escalate this type of anger?
5. Read Matthew 5:23-24. Jesus makes a surprising statement that relational reconciliation is so important that it should even take priority over a worship service. Why do you think that broken relationships can also hinder our relationship with God?
6. Matthew 5:25-26 refers to a culture where people could be thrown into prison if they did not pay their debts. The person who demanded immediate collection of the debt was viewed as an “adversary.” What principle does Jesus suggest when dealing with adversaries? What is an area in your life where this principle might apply?
7. How do you tend to deal with conflict? Do you tend to vent your anger or repress it? How do the words of Jesus provide an alternative to both of these extremes? How might your group members pray for you as you seek to live into Jesus’ alternate vision for handling your anger?