

## “The Danger of Anger”

*Matthew 5:21-26*

The Sermon on the Mount was Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisaic teaching that burdened the people with too many rules to follow (not specified in the Old Testament) which caused the people to believe they were not blessed of God. The eight blessings were Jesus' assurance to the people that God blesses us based on our clean hearts not our clean hands and our love for Him not our adherence to meticulous rules.

In 5:17-20 Jesus also assured the people that His teaching was not new; that He wasn't getting rid of the Old Testament. Instead He was returning to the Word to show how far the religious leaders had drifted from the truth in their teaching.

In the eighth blessing Jesus stated,

*<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

'Rejoice and be glad' when people 'persecute us? That's very radical. Our instinct is to get angry at those who harm us. Perhaps because this was so fresh in the people's minds Jesus starts with this whole idea of non-anger as He gives 6 illustrations of how the religious leaders had digressed from the Word of God. 'You have heard it said' was not a quote of Scripture (Because then He would have said 'It is written') but a quote of religious authorities who were giving their teaching about God (not all true however). So, the first one is found in 5:21-26 and what the Pharisees taught about murder.

*<sup>21</sup> "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.' <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> "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. <sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.*

Jesus taught that 'Do not murder' didn't only mean do not deliberately take someone's life. It was meant to help people avoid hurting people so it wouldn't lead to the extreme of taking their life. In this commandment. . .

**We Are Commanded Not to Deliberately  
Assassinate the Character of a Fellow Image-Bearer of God  
(5:21-22)**

The act of premeditated murder is due to the unwilling-ness to deal with the anger toward someone who has harmed them. They allow anger to fester in their hearts to the point where they begin to plot the destruction of someone personally. And similarly, this is how we destroy people's characters. We dwell on the hurt someone has done to us. We indulge in thinking of how to get even and possibly harm them; verbally at least, possibly even publicly or socially shaming them. We're angry because we feel we've been wronged; that we don't deserve to be treated that way.

### ***The Indulgence of anger is a form of self-righteousness (v.21-22a)***

Of course this is what the Pharisees were so good at; showing people how right and good they were. This is why Jesus said our righteousness should surpass that of the Pharisees, and here's one way we do it. Be aware of the self-righteousness mentality that creeps in when we dwell on how people have hurt us. 'Who do they think they are? Don't they know that I'm better . . . smarter . . . more deserving . . . etc. I'll show them. I'll get even. Jesus says when we act this way we become subject to judgment; which we should because we are doing a bad form of judging ourselves and those who have hurt us.

Jesus points out that expressed anger intended to harm – not just murder - leads to some kind of judgment. Why?

### ***Targeted anger is sin and worthy of punishment (v.22b)***

Jesus was employing a style of teaching that the Jews were familiar with which was use exaggeration to drive home a point. We'll see these even more clearly when He deals with lust. It was intended to shock the hearers. But the point being that when we intentionally harm someone with our words, its sin. And sin deserves the judgment of hell. And unless we deal with our sin and accept Christ as our Saviour we'll also reap the same judgment.

I say targeted anger as opposed to an acceptable anger that God and Jesus even show. Anger is an emotional reaction to a wrong done. God and Jesus react with anger when people are treated unjustly. Jesus flipped the money changer's tables because they were cheating the people, charging too much for animals to be sacrificed and using the court of the Gentiles (where they were supposed to worship) as their store. We don't see Jesus get angry when He was ridiculed, mistreated and crucified. We read in 1 Pet. 2:20

*But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. <sup>21</sup> To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."*

*<sup>23</sup> When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

So this is why we are to rejoice and be glad when we suffer for righteousness sake or for Jesus. It's a witness of trusting God and being like Jesus. But targeted anger, a reaction of verbal abuse towards another because we've been maligned is sin. And we are reminded that Jesus had to die for our sinful angry outbursts, our over reactions to people and situations and impatience with others because something we wanted right then didn't happen. It's sin. Let's start looking at it as sin and realize Jesus had to die for that sin. And if it weren't for the cross that angry out burst is enough evidence to send us to hell.

Jesus shows us the intent of sarcastic words and adjectives is 'murder' because we are destroying the character of an image bearer of God. Whether you say Raca or fool Jesus says,

## ***Insulting words are prohibited because it's a form of judgment (v.22c)***

And you and I have not been given the job of judging the character of anyone; that's God's job. The term 'Raca' was a term of contempt. When you said that toward someone in Jesus' day it was a way of saying they were useless, vile and wicked. You could be punished by the Sanhedrin for saying it. But Jesus says even if you call someone a 'fool' [again shock treatment] you should be judged by God.

We don't think the word 'fool' is that harsh a word. But in the Scriptures the fool is the 'unsaved; the godless; the one who shows no wisdom and doesn't even care about spiritual things.' We get the English word 'moron' from 'fool'. When we use words to harm others we are destroying their character, someone whom God has created and loves. Having that perspective about people in general will help us reduce our harsh words. We'll come back to the remedy toward the end of the message.

So, Jesus shocks His hearers by telling us judgmental attitudes and angry reactions that result in hurting others with our words is pre-murder and if left unchecked, it's what leads to murder. So we obviously need to confess it as sin and stop doing it. How seriously should we take this?

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

*<sup>25</sup> "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. <sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.*

When we realize we have sinned in this way we need to seek the forgiveness of the person we've harmed. Why? Because,

## **To Seek Forgiveness Shows the Reality of our Faith** **(5:23-26)**

The most important part of a Jewish person's worship is to bring their sacrifices to God at the temple. Since many people did not live in Jerusalem they didn't do it very often. Deut. 16:16-18 says,

*<sup>16</sup> Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles. No one should appear before the LORD empty-handed: <sup>17</sup> Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.*

I am intrigued that Jesus says 'gift' and not the word offering. While gift can refer to an animal sacrifice most of the time it refers to the offering of thanksgiving from the fruit of your land or possibly a freewill gift to God (money or produce) that is an expression of your love for God.

Yet here's what Jesus is saying; how can you say 'you love God by your act of worship when we've killed the character of His image bearer with our mean-spirited words?' If we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength we'll love our neighbour as ourselves. What Jesus is saying here is

***Forgiveness is more important than religious duties (5:24-25)***

What angered Jesus greatly was the Pharisaic adherence to all the sacrifices and yet their hearts were not right with God. They were belittling and devaluing the very people they were supposed to serve and point to God while falsely portraying themselves as meticulous keepers of the Laws of God. Again, Jesus isn't teaching anything new here. Samuel, speaking for God told Saul in 1Sam. 15,

*But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*

Jesus would quote Is. 29:13 in Matt. 15:8-9 saying about the Pharisees

**Matt. 15:8** *"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. <sup>9</sup> They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."*

Was Jesus saying stop your worship unless and so make things right with someone you've hurt? Again, Jesus is probably overstating the case as a form of shock treatment. Sometimes its not possible to do that geographically or even momentarily and the person we hurt may no longer be alive or accessible. What Jesus is saying is

### ***Pursue reconciliation while it's still possible (vv.25-26)***

That's what His next illustration points out.

<sup>25</sup> *"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. <sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.*

In Jesus' day if you delayed significantly or refused to pay a debt you could be thrown into debtor's prison. However, you can't make money when you're in prison! You are then indebted to your family and friends to bail you out! So Jesus says, deal with the debt of forgiveness quickly, while the one you hurt hasn't indulged in the offence himself and dwelled on it so long they will refuse to forgive you. The sooner the better for both parties. The illustration has nothing to do with your salvation; the point is to reconcile with those who you've hurt their character by your words quickly so that hearts have not hardened to the point where reconciliation will not happen.

What can we do to curb the words that come out of our tongues? Deal with the thoughts of our minds because that's where 'murderous', character assassinating thoughts begin. There are numerous passages we could go to but let's settle on two passages from the Apostle Paul. In Col. 3:8-11 Paul commands us,

<sup>8</sup> *But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.<sup>11</sup> Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

Paul likes the 'change your clothes' imagery, applying it to our minds. You can't put clean clothes over dirty clothes; you have to take the dirty one off if you want the clean ones to look right. Notice anger precedes the slander and filthy words that come out of our mouths. Identify anger. Ask why am I angry? Because my pride was hurt? Because things didn't go my way? Because what they

said was unfair, untrue or just meant to hurt? Leave it with Jesus if it was unfair and unjust, then put on the new self which is being renewed in the image of its Creator.

How do I know if I'm growing spiritually? One way is to ask yourself do I still react with anger towards the same things I have for years? Is my thinking a little newer today than last month, last year? Do I still think the same way I always have and never change my views or perspective even if it's not really biblical? Am I allowing the Word of God and who I am in Christ to change my attitude which changes my words? We're all the same in Christ, Paul said. We're all sinners who God loves. So if I want people to love me, a sinner saved by grace, I have to love them because God does in spite of our sins.

Another good passage is found in Eph. 4:25,

*<sup>25</sup> Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. <sup>26</sup> "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.*

*<sup>29</sup> Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

V. 29 sounds like 'make this vow to yourself not to let hurtful words come out of your mouth but building up words.' Our angry words grieve the Holy Spirit because fellow body members are assassinating the character of another body of Christ member. Again, hear the 'put off' language before you 'put on' language? V. 31 get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, etc., before you can be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving them just as in Christ God has forgiven you.

Jesus explained that "don't murder" meant don't let the process toward murder – assassinating the character of an image bearer of God - start in your heart. We are image bearers of God. We are hurt and even crushed by vindictive and harsh words. That may not be our intention, and we may even utter an empty 'sorry' after we said it, but Jesus says we are not the judge of another; that's His and God's job. Let's work on listening more and talking less and trying to speak wholesome talk that is helpful for the building up of others.

*Let's pray. Our righteous Father and eternal Judge, Jesus has cut us to the quick this morning with this passage. All of us are guilty before you for marring the character of another person as well as fellow body member of Christ. Like Daniel in Dan. 9 we need to confess,*

"Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>5</sup> we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. <sup>6</sup> We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

*But thankfully Lord, the real reason Daniel prayed for forgiveness was because He knows You do*

<sup>9</sup>The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; <sup>15</sup>"Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day . . . and in keeping with all your righteous acts... <sup>17</sup>"Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your people ... We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. <sup>19</sup> Lord, listen! Lord, forgive!

*Forgive us for grieving Your Spirit with hurting words and help us give serious thought about speaking words to build one another up so that it may benefit those who listen. Thank You for the cross once again, that we can confess our sins because You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Amen*

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