



From Anger to Reconciliation

Matthew 5:21-26 | J. Austin Becton | July 12, 2015

If you were here last week we will be stepping back a few verses to Matthew 5:21-26. Today, we will be looking at anger and reconciliation. Let me kick us off with a story.

Jack meets Jill in college. They get engaged and then married. Throughout their marriage, they have been blessed with steady employment, beautiful homes, and way more than they needed. In many ways, they are living the American dream. They seem to have it all together. On top of that they are active members of their local church serving in several different capacities including leadership. People often look at them and think, “Man, they have it together!” Yet, beneath this veneer of success resides a hidden battle with anger. A high achiever and hard worker, Jack drives himself and his family to perform up to his standards. And when he doesn’t get the results he wants – Jill’s affection, his friends’ affirmation, his boss’s praise, or people responding to his leadership as he’d like – he becomes angry – being more critical of his wife, bad-mouthing his friends and co-workers behind their backs – quickly points out the flaws of those he is leading – sometimes this even results in him punching a wall and throwing something across a room. Jill, too, faces anger. Unlike Jack, she rarely loses outward control of her emotions and words, but inside she resents Jack for his high demands and critiques, so she becomes embittered. Beneath her breath she complains about his insensitivity and lack of pursuit of her. In turn, her affections for Jack have become tainted and poisoned. She often finds herself angry with God for allowing her into a relationship like this. The scenarios are plenty. Nevertheless, most of us can relate to some variation of these feelings. And, likely, all of us have relationships, broken by anger that we’d like to see restored. But, what does Jesus have to say about this? We will see that Jesus calls us to flee anger and pursue reconciliation.

The Negative – Flee Anger

Jesus starts by saying, “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.” The Pharisees and scribes would often hold themselves to the letter of the law; they could measure their morality and holiness this way. But the law was **not** meant to be a measuring stick. It was **not** meant to show us exactly what to do and what not to do so we would be drones for Yahweh. The law was meant to be the living commands of Yahweh, God, setting the children of Israel apart from the world – not simply in their outward expressions, but in their hearts. It was intended to instruct Israel how to be holy, and in being holy to be a reflection of God and his holy character to the world around them. Paul speaks of this in Romans 2, “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.” So, Jesus pulls out the spirit of the law from within the letter of the law. He asks, Can one commit murder without first being angry? Did Cain kill Abel without first becoming jealous and angry? Does abuse occur without first retreating into bitterness and anger? Do atrocities such as the beheading of Christians by ISIS happen without first being deeply rooted in hate and anger? Even as we look to these examples, we are quick to justify ourselves, “I’m not that angry.” But Jesus, in shining the spotlight on the spirit of the law, digs deeper to reveal the true character and behavior of those that inherit the kingdom of heaven. I can imagine someone saying, “Whoa Jesus! You’re saying if I am angry with Asher over there I’m liable for the same judgment as a murderer? How is that possible?” Jesus knows that the heart produces the fruit. So, moves past the resulting, sometimes visible fruit, **even that of murder**, and begins examining the condition of our hearts. C.S. Lewis notes in *Mere Christianity*, “One man may be so placed that his anger sheds the blood of thousands, and another so placed that however angry he gets he will only be laughed at. But the little mark on the soul may be much the same in both [...] The bigness or smallness of the thing, seen from the outside, is not what really matters.” I recall...[TSA Illustration] Have you been marked by anger? Perhaps your colleague drives you up the wall? Even the way he is so nice to others makes you boil. Or perhaps someone doesn’t respect that fact that you’re an introvert and you’ve hit your social capacity for the day so you snap at him or her when they ask you an innocent question. Or maybe you’re in a disagreement with a spouse or friend, you aren’t “winning,” so you resort to punching a hole through the wall...or a glass pane if you are stupid enough...or



worse. Jesus, reaching into the very core of our hearts, is saying – You thought you were a good and moral person because you never committed murder, but aren't you presently angry with your friend? Avoiding them at all cost. Didn't you recently flip off the person next to you in traffic because they mistakenly didn't see you in the next lane? Didn't you spank your child out of simple frustration yesterday? I recall you telling me that our boss was an idiot because he does not run the department as you see fit. In revealing the spirit of the law Jesus calls us full circle, to face our "poorness in spirit" as we stand before the revealed holiness of the law. Which of you has never been angry? He who is without anger cast the first stone at this murderer! Jesus gives weight to his previous exhortation, *"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* You feel it? Under this weight we may feel tempted to find a loophole to justify our anger. "Well," we might say, "there is righteous anger!" Righteous anger does exist, but we MUST proceed with wisdom and caution. Romans 2:5 speaks of the righteous wrath of God and in the NT we see several examples of Jesus's righteous anger - most notably his interactions with the merchants who had defamed the temple. Similarly, being created in the image of God we all feel, though imperfectly, the divine pull of justice. It's why we cringe and cry out when a child is molested...when a woman has been brutally beaten by her husband...or when a Christian has been shot in their place of worship by a racist fanatic There is indeed a place for a burning anger against sin and injustice. But if we are honest with ourselves, most of the time that little mark on our soul is quick the flare up if we are offended, hurt, or rejected in some way, but is often slow to rise at the sin and injustices that pile up around us. Righteous anger will be stirred by sin, but will weep for the soul of the sinner, while unrighteous simply burns at the sinner with no concern for their soul. As such, righteous anger is founded in godly love, while unrighteous anger is rooted in pride from a self-centered heart. Often do we allow ourselves to become angry at a friend because they didn't give you the affirmation you wanted...or at a spouse because they didn't acknowledge your needs...or a leader of some sort because they didn't give you clear enough directions? Do you hang on to it? Does it eat you up? Do you become a grump? Does it wreck your mood? Your day? What emotions do you experience when you hear about ISIS? Or the AME church shooting? Of the burning of numerous historically black churches motivated by the hatred of a race? Do you get angry at these outrageous sins? Do you weep for the victims? Do you mourn for the souls of the perpetrators? We should not be quick to allow ourselves out of the absoluteness of this passage. Essentially, Jesus calls our attention to the fact that we all have been marked by unrighteous anger. And, he knows this anger is deeply relational, touching our relationships with one another and with God. And so, he breaks into two examples showing us how we are to repair the damaged caused by our anger by pursuing reconciliation.

The Positive – Pursue Reconciliation

First, Jesus says, *"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."* Jesus makes a pretty bold declaration. Your reconciliation with others is more important than showing up to a Sunday morning service. Acknowledging our tendency for all us to value ceremony over holiness. Jesus is saying, *"Look, you pat yourselves on the back when you serve in Kid's Life, give money to the church, or attend City Group. Yet, beneath your breath you complain, unfairly critique, and judge one another."* It's not enough simply to avoid fits of anger like Jack, but you need to actually have a heart that pursues after reconciliation. Perhaps what Jesus is really picturing isn't isolated individuals seeking to repress their fits of anger, but rather disciples joining together in the urgent and difficult call of reconciliation through repentance and forgiveness. Look, reconciliation is not a cheap passivity that pretends like nothing happened, nor does it mean you instantly trust the one that has broken your trust. Genuine, biblical reconciliation requires an honest acknowledgement of real sin, followed by real repentance and real forgiveness – usually this is the responsibility of both parties. A disciple who is truly ready to pursue reconciliation has already repented, and if they have been offended has forgiven the offender in their heart. However, if you carry the mark of anger you will find yourself reluctant to reconcile. Remember, a person with righteous anger says I am angry at the sin and mourn for the sinner. He will be quick to repent because he understands that all sinners and fall short of God holiness, and for the same reason he will be quick to forgive. But, one with unrighteous anger says I am ticked AT YOU because YOU have offended ME. And, buried beneath all of this is a spirit of self-righteousness that says I am the judge and jury – I wasn't wrong – they were – therefore I have nothing to repent of. They aren't quick to repent or forgive. Jack and Jill Perhaps, like Jack, you've been known to lash out. And, in one of



your fits of angry rants about your political views you said something unkind to a friend, belittling them in front of your peers. You've forgotten about it until now, but they still feel the sting of your words. Go and be reconciled. Don't wait for the perfect time. Don't postpone it – grab them after church...reach out to them at your next City Group. Maybe you related with the way Jill reacted and you've become soured by the hurtful actions or words of someone in your City Group, and so you decided to withdrawal and not attend for a little while. Go and be reconciled today – do not delay. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of a Christian to pursue reconciliation even if the other party does not. Perhaps you read the recent Associated Press news article titled, *Forgiveness of Charleston Church Shooter Prompts Discussion*, which goes to report... [One day after the June 17 massacre at Emanuel AME, Chris Singleton, son of victim Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, said he forgave his mother's killer. The following day, other family members of the dead joined told Dylann Roof, the shooter, they, too, forgave him — even as some acknowledged also feeling angry and hurt. "Everyone's plea for your soul is proof that they lived in love, and their legacies will live in love. So hate won't win," said Alana Simmons, granddaughter of victim, Rev. Daniel Simmons. Similarly, forgiveness was extended in recent days after several Southern black churches were burned down. "We've already forgiven them, and we want to move forward," said the pastor of Briar Creek Road Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina." And we are hoping this is an opportunity for Christ to show himself in their hearts."] (Paraphrased) You can almost here Jesus saying in these stories as he did upon the cross, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." Are you aware that someone has an offense against you or perhaps has offended you without repenting and seeking reconciliation? Have you set still declaring yourself in the right and not perused reconciliation? Or have you pursue reconciliation? Have you forgiven them? You can't force reconciliation, but you can pursue it. Second, Jesus brings to light the urgency for us to come before God in humble, faithful repentance, he says, **"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."** In our anger, not only do we hurt one another, but also we sin against God. And so, as Jesus brings out the spirit of law we stand accused by law...not because we have murdered, but because we have been angry, hostile, and sour towards one another. We have placed our significance, validation, happiness, and fulfillment above everyone else...including God. Under this weight of these accusations, it is understandable why Peter cried out, *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."* Before such holiness one almost can't help but be immediately aware of their brokenness and sin, and so Jesus says, "quickly come to terms with your accuser." Do you feel that little mark of anger on your soul? Are you tired holding on to your bitterness? Are you tired of embarrassing your self and others because of your selfish explosions? Do you yearn to have a friendship that has been torn by anger restored? C. S. Lewis concludes **"Each [the one who shed the blood of thousands and the one who was merely laughed at] has done something to himself which, unless he repents, will make it harder for him to keep out of the rage next time he is tempted [...]. Each of them, if he seriously turns to God, can have that twist in the central man straightened out again."** And that is the good news this morning! The mark on our soul, the twisted heart that anger has created inside of us can be made straight. Though we stand accused before the God's holy law. It doesn't end there. Jesus is saying, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I'm am making all things new – even you!" How?

The Good News

God's just wrath is real. His righteous anger burns against that which rebels from his holy character...the evil, injustice and sin, which twists, distorts, and leads to death. BUT, because God so LOVED the world...note that it was not "God was so ANGRY with the world," but God so LOVED the world that he sent his only Son, Jesus into that world that whosoever would believe in him, the twist in their lives could be straightened out again. And so, Jesus lived the life we should live, he held perfectly to the spirit of the law. When he was prejudicially arrested, unjustly tried, inhumanly beaten, offensively spit, crucified, and then mocked...when he had every reason to rise up in anger...he did not...he simply cried out, *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."* If we have been tainted by anger, if we carry it's mark, let us repent and turn to God placing our faith in Jesus, who held perfectly to the law. In so doing, we find true lasting forgiveness as we are reconciled with God and are given a new life. The twist begins to unwind, the character and behavior kingdom dwellers begins to flow through and out of us. Let us no longer to be marked by anger, but let us carry the mark of reconciliation that flows from reconciliation to God in Christ.