

March 6, 2022 – Anger

James 1:19-20

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20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.



Laid At His Feet

A Lenten Study

Can we let go of the things that we love that hold us back?

ANGER

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Special Music:

“Why God” Austin French

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iv_Pf7bDZj4

THE MECHANIC

Jake had always loved engines, and no one found it unusual when he chose the life of a mechanic. He started working on cars in high school and he knew it was his calling. He took jobs with various dealers and repair centers, learning everything the older mechanics could teach him. Every paycheck, he set money aside in a special savings account and at the age of twenty-eight, he had saved up enough to open his own shop in the small town where he had grown up. It didn't take him long to grow his small shop into a thriving small business with loyal customers.

Jake was a hands-on owner. He let others deal with the paperwork. All he really wanted to do was be the best mechanic he could and making his customers happy. He made it a practice to hire young people that wanted to learn the trade of auto-repair and then teach them what he knew. He was their friend, counselor, teacher, and mentor.

Adam was the newest of these trainees. He might have been young and still quite gangly, but he was a hard worker and absorbed Jake's teaching like a sponge. The only problem with Adam was that he was easily distracted, unfocused, and sometimes careless. He would forget to put the floor mat protectors down, cover the steering wheel, or not put seat protectors in place on the cars he was working on. But Jake liked the boy and felt that those details would be overcome with maturity.

Mr. Smallhouse had been a customer of Jake's since he had first day the shop opened. He trusted Jake with all of his vehicles. Today, he had brought in his wife's Chevy for an oil change. Arriving during lunch hour he told Jake that his wife had to drive to Newton the following morning, so he really needed the car back by the end of the day. Jake looked at the schedule and didn't see any way he could free up anyone to take on an oil change with a quick turnaround. About that time, Adam had just finished putting new tires on Mr. Jackson's pickup and he strolled over to let Jake know he had finished the job much sooner than expected. Jake turned to Mr. Smallhouse and asked him if he would mind if

Adam did the oil change and Mr. Smallhouse agreed, so long as he could pick the car up on his way home that evening. Problem solved. Jake gave Mr. Smallhouse a ride back to his office while Adam put the car on the rack and started the oil change.

When Jake returned, he was happy to find his protégé hard at work. Adam had already drained the oil and replaced the filter. He was adding the new oil when Jake came over to check on the progress. Adam had just topped off the oil and was about to put the oil cap back in place. Jake asked how everything was going and Adam told him he was just about to start the engine to make sure that the filter wasn't leaking. With that, he moved around, climbed into the driver's seat, and started the car. As the engine engaged, oil went flying everywhere, drenching Jake in the process. Adam quickly killed the engine and went to look at the mess. He realized that when Jake had come up to him, he had allowed himself to be distracted and had forgotten to screw the oil cap into place. What a mess. Everything under the hood of the car and the floor of the workspace were covered with oil.

Jake stood by the car, fresh lubricant dripping from his clothes and his face. Adam got him a shop towel and waited for the inevitable lecture on his carelessness and the mess that he had caused. Instead, Jake wiped his face and clothes with the towel and walked calmly across the shop. Without a word, he picked up a package of clean towels and returned to the car. He pulled a towel from the stack and began to clean the engine compartment of Mr. Smallhouse's car. After a few seconds, Adam also grabbed a towel and began cleaning up the mess. It took almost the whole stack of cleaning rags and a full hour of them working side by side to remove the oil from the car and clean the workstation. When they were through, Jake watched as Adam refilled the car with oil and carefully put the oil cap in place. Adam then started the car and checked for leaks. Everything was as it should be.

The young man did not know how to apologize to his boss. He knew he had really messed up this time. The fact that Jake had taken the time to help him

clean up the mess left him confused. He really felt that he probably should have been fired. Adam grabbed the dirty towels and put them in the bin to be cleaned. Then he headed for the work sink to clean himself up. He turned on the water and reached for the soap, but Jake had come up behind him without him knowing it and beat him to the soap. Adam realized how selfish he had been. Jake was the one who was covered with oil, and he was the boss. Of course, he should have the opportunity to clean up first. Adam stepped aside to let Jake in closer to the sink.

But then Jake did something totally unexpected. He gently took Adam's hands in his and began to wash away the oil and the grime. This man, his mentor, had taken the full brunt of Adam's mistake and was now washing the grit and grime off Adam's hands. The young man noticed the callouses and scars from decades of working on cars as the elderly man gently scrubbed Adam's not-so-scarred and calloused hands. The boy tried to pull away, but Jake would not let go. Adam felt so ashamed. How could he let this man that he respected so much, this man who had been nothing but kind to him, how could he, in good conscience, allow Jake to wash his hands? When Adam's hands were clean, Jake grabbed a fresh towel and carefully dried them off. Only then did the elderly mechanic begin to clean his own face, hands, and clothes.

Adam started to speak, but Jake stopped him and said, "My dear boy. I can teach you so many things about cars. But that knowledge is worthless if you do not understand the people in your life. Never allow your anger to prevent you from serving others. Such anger is misplaced. When you are able to serve those who have hurt you, confused you, taken advantage of you, and abused you, that is when you become an example of how God sees you and expects you to interact with others."

Of all the things this gentle, hard-working, gracious mechanic had taught him, this lesson of the value of people was the one that became a permanent part of Adam's moral character.

Lent is the season in which many Christian denominations celebrate the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness just prior to the beginning of His ministry. Our journey through Lent should be a time of self-reflection and recommitment. At the urging of the Holy Spirit, Jesus went out into the desert and fasted for forty days. At the end of that forty days, Jesus faced the temptations of Satan. Every day of our Christian life, we are faced with temptations as well. Like Jesus, we should confront those temptations with a passion akin to being children our Creator. We are blessed with the strength of character we receive from Christ Jesus, and the wisdom granted to us through the Holy Spirit.

As Christ was challenged by Satan, He responded with scripture. We should allow Christ to instruct us through scripture so that we to have the answers that we need when we seek to defend ourselves from temptation as we face our inner demons and resist the attempts to forget our faith and our place as heirs in the Kingdom of God. The best way to do that is to lay those inner demons at the feet of Jesus; give them over to Him so that He can guide us and grant us victory over them.

It is common during the season of lent to give up something that we love to show our appreciation for all that Jesus has done for us. It is a representation of the time of Jesus' fasting and sacrifice in the desert. This is known as the Lenten Sacrifice. I'm going to challenge you through these messages, that there are things in our lives that we value far more than cake, candy, coffee, or tea; things that create a barrier between us and our Christian growth. I want you to consider

laying these dark aspects of our soul at the feet of Jesus so that we can grow closer to God, making us better tools to serve our community. Giving these things up is not as easy as giving up ice cream or steak for a season. No, I'm asking far more from you. These are things that you need to lay at the feet of Jesus and never pick up again. They are a permanent sacrifice and represent your willingness to grant Christ greater access to your heart and mind.

Today we will talk about anger. Every last one of us has been a victim of this emotion, even to the point of being out of control. And, if we are honest with ourselves, we like our anger. We want our anger. We feel we have a right to that anger. It belongs to us and we refuse to let go. Especially when someone is mean to us, steals from us, hurts us, lies to us, or even just inconveniences us. We want to be able to rage against the machine. We want to give advice to people who don't drive their cars with the etiquette we expect. We want to be upset when we experience customer service that doesn't reach minimum height of the bar that we expect. We want to demand attention when we feel we aren't getting the attention we deserve. And we get angry when politicians don't do what we believe they should do, doctors who keep us waiting too long, and people who seem to get angry with us for no apparent reason. In the majority of these situation, we feel people should behave the way we expect them to behave. And when they don't, it makes us angry. This is anger that is self-generated and needs to be avoided.

Righteous anger, however, comes from a place deep within that encourages us to act when we see intolerance and injustice. When we see the

poor, the disenfranchised, the marginalized, the hungry, and the homeless who are being neglected and rejected, who receive no respect, people being kicked while life has already dropped them on the ground. That righteous anger is the anger comes from our relationship with God. It is our duty and obligation to protect those who cannot protect themselves. When we see Jesus in the temple turning over the tables of the money changers and the sellers of sacrificial animals, that is the nature of righteous anger. It is an example where the people are being taken advantage of and have no recourse.

Today's passage of scripture is from the first chapter of James. James, the brother of Jesus, is not considered to be one of the original Apostles but became a believer later. His letter is written to the Jewish Christian community that is living outside of the nation of Israel.

When James talks about anger in our passage of scripture today, he breaks the emotion of anger into two separate parts.

19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

As Christians, we are often told that anger is something to be avoided at all costs. Angry people tend to hurt other people. Two angry people can be explosive. A crowd of angry people is considered to be a mob. But is that what James is talking about here?

He's giving us some safe advice in this verse. And, if you will notice, anger is the last thing he talks about. Please note that everything before that is an approach to avoid anger. Anger is a last resort. Now what does he tells us?

1. Everyone should be quick to listen. The simple truth is that if we are shouting at one another, we aren't listening to one another. We seem to think that whoever shouts the loudest, wins. I've seen arguments between people who were in total agreement with each other but didn't realize it because they were too busy shouting at each other to hear what was being said. We need to listen to each other. We need to be able to hear where the pain is coming from. We cannot shout through the other person's pain and expect to meet their needs. They can't tell us where it hurts, if we cannot hear what they are saying, even if they are saying it loudly. We need to stop and listen in order to provide comfort and reason. At the same time, we should be quick, intentional, and involved with our listening. Listening is not secondary to the conversation. I should be the priority. In order to truly be God's hands and feet in this world, we also need to be God's ears. Listening with the ears of God means we value the other person and their pain above our own.

2. At the same time, everyone should be slow to speak. These two thoughts go hand-in-hand. We need to consider our words carefully. Our words need to be a true reflection of a desire to maintain a healthy

conversation and provide support for others. We need to ask ourselves if what we are about to say is what Jesus would say. Are our words meant to lift or tear down? Do our words provide substance to the conversation or prove to the other person that we aren't listening and don't really care about their opinion? Can we speak to one another in such a way that both opinions matter and are worthy of our words? It's not so much about finding common ground. That may never be possible. It is more about respect, engagement, and encouragement. We can agree to disagree without pounding each other with hateful dialogue, misappropriated scripture, and unverified theology.

James goes on to explain why all this matters; why we should always seek to find a peaceful path in our conversations; why we should avoid taking the low road, even if we see others choosing that path. Verse 20 says this:

because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

There is that word again. Righteous. Our personal agenda does not reflect the righteousness that God desires for us. We are called to be like Jesus and the only anger we see from Him is righteous anger. The anger He expresses is never petty or self-serving. It is always used to lift the people around Him and point them towards a righteous God.

There are many places in the New Testament where we think that Jesus would have been justified to show anger. Remember when Mary is so angry with Him because He wasn't there to save Lazarus? How about the temptations that He faced where Satan is trying to trick Him? Or in the garden, when the soldiers come to arrest Him? Where was His anger when the people turned on Him and demanded the release of Barabbas? Jesus has the power of God at His disposal and chooses not to allow anger get a foothold in these moments of abuse and persecution. He chooses a path of grace rather than anger out of His compassion for people. As they beat Him, spat upon Him, mocked Him, placed a crown of thorns on His head, led him through the streets like a common criminal, gambled for His clothes, nailed Him to a cross, pierced his side with a spear, and executed Him through a religious political agenda, He never showed anger. Only sorrow and compassion because they did not understand what they were doing. The words He spoke were words of forgiveness, grace and mercy.

And when we consider the table that we celebrate, we remember that Christ chose to wash the feet of all the disciples, even those who would betray, desert, and deny him. He washed the feet of James and John while they bickered over who was the greatest. He washed the feet of Peter who would deny him three times even though he was forewarned. He washed the feet of Thomas who was in a cloud of disbelief. And yes, he washed the feet of Judas who would count the price of thirty pieces of silver for his betrayal. There was no anger in this act of foot washing. Only love, grace, and mercy.

It is so easy for us to justify our anger when someone hurts us, lies to us, cheats us, or takes advantage of us. We feel entitled to our anger. But none of those are justification for anger. It certainly does not example how our Lord perceived and used anger. Our anger should always be a Righteous anger, where God gives us vision for how badly we treat one another and sends us forth to correct the wrongs that people suffer.

In Matthew 16, Jesus is talking to His disciples and tells them that He has to go to Jerusalem and that He will suffer many things, that He will die there, and that He will rise on the third day. But Peter pulls Him aside and argues with Him telling Him not to talk that way, that such a thing is not possible. Jesus' angry response to Peter can be found in Matthew 16:23:

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Is Jesus speaking to us? Anger that serves only human concerns, self-satisfaction, revenge, and pride, does not serve the purpose of God and does not come from God. It is something to be avoided at all costs. There is no love, mercy, or grace in it.

We are all human. We seek control of these banal emotions in our lives. We feel we have the right as humans to justify our anger even when confronted with the truth that such anger does not serve God. Somewhere in the back of our minds, we think we will be losing something that is core to our existence if we let

go of our anger. But remember, as Christians, we lay everything at the feet of Jesus. That includes what we believe is part of our essence, what makes us ... well, us. Still, we are new creatures in Christ as He rebuilds us from within. We cannot have a successful transformation if we don't allow Him access to our core.

For this first message, I want us all to look deep inside ourselves and prayerfully ask if we have truly given the emotion of anger over to God. Do we allow God to be in control of the fireworks within our soul? Are we quick to listen and slow to speak? Is the anger within us a righteous anger or one driven by our own ego?

As our first sacrifice of Lent, let's each of us give God control over our anger so that our Lord can use that anger to further the Kingdom.

God bless you all.

AMEN

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