

Default Settings

Week 1: Why is Everyone So Angry?

Matthew 6:21-24

As we dive in today, I want to ask for your prayers. I'm heading out for a short mission trip in a couple of weeks to a place that is pretty hostile. I don't know what kind of reception I'll receive when I get there, but that's okay. I'm just hoping to introduce them to Jesus and point them in the right direction.

So, pray for me as I go to speak at a revival up in Lafayette next Tuesday night. It would really mean a lot. When they asked me to speak, I was like, "Sure, but...you know where I'm from, right?"

A couple of weeks ago, I got to have breakfast with the guy organizing the event and some of the other speakers. One of them is a good friend of mine named Andrew Cullen. He's at Nashville Christian Church over in Brown Co. and is actually going to be here to preach in June. Andrew is in his late 20's and the rest of us are in various stages of the 40's. I'm actually the next youngest guy. Which is what made what happened over breakfast that morning hurt even more.

We were going around, talking about what we were going to be preaching on, and when it got to Andrew, I kid you not, the leader of the event said, "Andrew, I'm so glad you're coming. I'm especially excited for you to preach...*because we have been praying for a younger guy to be a part of the event!* Someone who's more relatable to the youth." The other guys around the table all looked at each other like..."Did he just call us old and unrelatable?!" We were offended!

Two things happened in that moment. Number 1, I immediately took out my phone and made a note of that conversation for this sermon so I wouldn't forget it. Which, as I say that, sounds like something an old person would do. Andrew probably doesn't have to do that...

Number 2, I thought, as a people, we get so easily offended by the words and actions of others. Even if they didn't mean anything by it. We are easily offended. And, I imagine some of you are offended right now that I'm saying you are easily offended. You're sitting there saying, "No I'm not! How dare you! You don't know me!" Some of you are offended by how easily other people get offended by stuff.

Honestly, I find myself in that place sometimes. I did a search for dumb things people have gotten offended by, thought I might use it today, and I found myself getting angry and offended by the dumb things other people got offended by. What is wrong with me?! I was offended by their offense!

We live in an offensive world and it's so easy to get caught up in. It seems like anger is the default setting in our world today. It's what we all go to without even giving it a second

thought. And, when we feel angry, we take offense at anything that feels slightly offensive, which then fuels our anger, which makes us more easily offendable, which makes us more angry, which makes it easier to find offense everywhere we look.

But, what if your life could be different? What if you could learn how to become unoffendable in an offensive world? If you could become a non-anxious presence in the midst of the anxiety and turmoil others feel like they're drowning in. What if, instead of engaging in that social media debate because you were offended by what a random stranger posted, you were just able to keep scrolling by. Instead of accepting the invitation to every argument you're invited into, you were able to choose your battles wisely.

What if you were able to change your default settings so that anger was not your first response to an offense? I think it would change everything. It would have an impact on your spiritual health, your mental health, and relationships. You would be able to walk through this world with more peace and joy, not because you're turning a blind eye to the realities of the sometimes-offensive things happening around you, but because you're choosing not to carry them and make them your own. Instead, you're turning them over to Jesus and allowing Him to change your heart.

I believe that Jesus wants something better for you than what we see in the world around us. He wants to fill you with His peace because he loves you. He's FOR you and shows us a better way to live. So, my prayer for the next few weeks is that Jesus, our Good Shepherd, will gather our hearts closer to Him and begin to change that default setting of anger inside of us that is switched to the "On" position in only the way that HE can.

And, as our Good Shepherd, Jesus warns us about our enemy who wants us to keep wandering in the wilderness of anger and offense. He says this in **John 10:10, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy."** Brad Pontius said this week, the only thing Satan desires is to steal our joy, crush our hopes, and destroy our relationships. That's it. That's his purpose for you. And anger can do all of those things in one fell swoop.

So, to take you behind the scenes a little bit...I always thought that phrase was "one fail swoop," but then I wrote it down and was like, "that can't be right. What is it?" So I looked it up and it's actually "one fell swoop." I guess, growing up in Indiana, "fail" and "fell" are the same word depending on the accent.

But, it took me down this interesting little rabbit hole. The phrase is derived from the image of a hawk swooping down and snatching away its defenseless prey. It's a fierce and merciless assault. I thought that is such a fitting picture of what Satan does through our anger. **Anger is a fierce and merciless assault on our joy, hopes, and relationship.** It swoops in and snatches it away.

But, we are not defenseless against it. **(John 10:10)** Because, even though the thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy, Jesus says, "My purpose is to give them (to give you)

a rich and satisfying life.” And Jesus does this by showing us how God intended for us to live and then empowering us with the Holy Spirit to pursue that kind of rich and satisfying life in Him.

So, if you have your Bible’s open, or a Bible app you like to use, let’s go to our text. Matthew 5:21. One of the ways I love to study Scripture is to think of it as three different things. I’ve used this before. Scripture is a picture, in that we can look at it and see something that happened, kind of frozen in time. We can learn what it means.

But Scripture is also a window through which we can see and understand our world. We can often times see the picture of Scripture being played out in front of us as we look through the window of it into our world, and it starts to make sense of things. We realize that, what we see in the picture, and what we see through the window, looks a lot alike.

But, Scripture is also a mirror. I see myself in Scripture, and it often times reveals those places where the Holy Spirit still has work to do in me. And so, I want to look at our text today that way. Look at the picture to see what’s happening. Use it as a window to make sense of our world. And then we’ll close by holding it up as a mirror to see ourselves in it. So, **Matthew 5:21-22...(READ)**

So, what is going on? Well, Jesus starts with the words, “You’ve heard that it was said...” and then he quotes one of the 10 commandments, do not murder. And what Jesus is doing in this section is he’s helping people understand the spirit of the Law. They knew the letter of the Law. They knew what it said, but they had missed God’s intentions behind it.

And so, Jesus is clarifying what life, as God intended it to be, that rich and satisfying life, Jesus is describing how we can find that kind of life. And he starts by saying, “It’s not by simply abstaining from homicide.” That’s GOOD, but incomplete. God has an even better way for us to live that’s actually revealed in the spirit of the Law, not just the letter of it. And what he desires for us is that we become a less angry person. That we switch that default setting to “Off.”

And he gives us three different expressions of our anger that I think God wants to heal us from. The first is that short fuse, impulsive, quick-tempered kind of anger. It lashes out and seeks quick revenge. And then he says, “Anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca!’ is answerable to the court.” I don’t know about you, but I’ve never said “Raca” to anyone, so I’m good. But, I don’t think it’s about the phrase. It’s about the intent.

“Raca” was a phrase used to demean another person. People in higher classes would use it as a greeting for those in lower classes. Literally, it was them saying, “Hey there, you idiot.” It was a verbal way of demeaning another person made in the image of God. It was used to put people in their place and communicate a sense of superiority. I’m better than you.

Same with “You fool.” It was a statement that would write someone off as having nothing to offer. Basically saying their thoughts were worthless, and by extension, they were worthless.

And, as we look up from the picture of this text, I think we start to see our world through it. We see how anger can so quickly turn from being mad to having a sense of moral superiority and contempt for another person. It’s not long before we just write them off as worthless. But then you add the identity politics of our culture and we begin to group people.

And so, it grows from, “That person’s an idiot,” to “Those people are idiots” and we feel a sense of moral superiority and contempt for those who don’t think or act or vote like we do. Whether we’ve met them or not, we’ve already cast judgment on their character and find ourselves predisposed to be offended by anything they say or do. And while murder isn’t *always* the outcome, there’s a whole lot of character assassination happening. And when we use Scripture as a window into our world, we see why. It’s because people are feeling a deep sense of anger.

So, we go back to the question of today’s sermon. “Why is everyone so angry?” And to answer it, I think we need to look at the last part of our text for today. These verses have been a picture of what Jesus is teaching, a window into our world and why we act the way we do. But in verse 23 we start to look at ourselves in the mirror. (READ Matt. 5:23-24)

Did you catch what Jesus does here? He goes from saying, “If anyone is angry, if anyone says Raca, if anyone says you fool...” He goes from “If anyone” to “You” and he starts to make it personal. Like, in case we were only thinking of all those “other people” that struggle with their anger, Jesus uses the pronoun, “You” six times in those two verses. He holds a mirror up and exposes the anger that resides in us, too.

And, he does it by taking us from “out there” to right in here. He takes us to the altar. The place of worship. And, in doing so, Jesus shows us that our anger is not because of what is happening outside of us, it’s because of what is going on inside of us. And, when we look at our own hearts, and we see all of our anger and how easily we are offended by others, we begin to see, in the words of our modern day philosopher, Taylor Swift, “It’s me, hi, I’m the problem it’s me.”

She sings it sarcastically in that song, but it’s true. Our problem with anger and being so easily offended has less to do with what is happening around us and more to do with what is happening in our heart. The anger in our life, and our supernatural ability to be offended by anything, is a reflection of in here, not out there.

And, when we look in the mirror of Scriptures like these, I come away convicted that my heart is broken beyond belief. I struggle with anger. I feel a sense of moral superiority when I’m offended. I say things under my breath like, “That idiot” when someone does something

that makes me angry. And I'm guessing I'm not the only one. And the words of verse 21 and 22 are words of judgement for our angry and judgmental hearts.

But, don't miss this. **Although your heart is broken beyond belief, it's not broken beyond repair.** Your default setting might have been anger and offense and judgement for as long as you can remember, but Jesus has the grace and love and power to change it. And he goes in there and does what only he can do when we acknowledge that we can't change it on our own.

We can't change our default settings by trying harder or being better. It requires a full system reset, and only Jesus can do it. And when we put our faith in this life, death, and resurrection...when we turn our lives, our anger, our offenses over to Him...he begins to heal us, give us a new life and a fresh start.

Your heart is broken beyond belief, just like mine, but it's not broken beyond repair. Jesus wants to give you a rich and satisfying life. A life free from the bondage of anger and the exhaustion that comes from being so easily offended. He wants to rescue you from living under the weight of your sin and all the ways you've angered and offended others.

If you're ready to find that new life and fresh start, it can happen today.