



Sermon

5 March 2023

What Makes God Angry?

Mark 10:13-16

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On 10th February we looked briefly at the subject of anger. I wonder how many people's ears pricked up on that day, like mine, and have put some thought into the subject since. As we go through Lent, we will be looking at the subject of anger more closely. Today I want to address the subject, "What Makes God Angry?" As we start, let us pray. "Lord, we love you. We hate the thought of you being angry with us. Help us to recognise when we are following only our own desires and making you angry. Instead of hearts of stone, which don't care when we hurt you, give us hearts of flesh."

Anger was identified by the early church as being one of the 7 "deadly sins", but there must be more to the issue, because God cannot sin, and the Bible is full of references to his anger and wrath. Take a guess how many times the word "wrath" is in the Bible... 469. The word "anger" shows up 651 times. The word "angry"? 541 times. That's a lot of air-time, a lot of attention. So it is good for us to think carefully about anger. We are made in God's image, and he gets angry.

I only remember one time when I was a child when my father got angry with me. He chased me around the house wielding a rifle cleaner, but I was smaller and more agile than he and by the time I had escaped through the dining room, along the back porch, out of the back door and away, his anger had simmered down. When I came back, he had put the rifle cleaner down. Dad was a Christian Pacifist and was firmly convinced about the rightness of his stance. He took very seriously his commitment to Jesus' teaching about turning the other cheek. So I must have been acting like a particularly horrible little brat that day, to provoke his wrath to such an extent!

So what makes God angry? And why is God allowed to be angry, but we aren't? Are we allowed to be angry?

First, God's anger is righteous anger. This is the only kind of anger that God exercises. We often view anger as an emotion we should avoid - a sin. But our anger isn't the problem, it's what we do with our anger that determines if we sin or not.

Look with me at Ephesians 4:26: "In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold." God gets angry,

but he does not sin and he therefore has no place within himself that the devil can use as a foothold.

In fact, there are things in this world that **should** make us angry. We should be outraged, like God, by injustices, angry violence, theft, poverty, and disrespect for God that run rampant in our society. That should stir up an anger deep within us because it's just not right. That anger is appropriate; it's a righteous anger. It's the same anger that God feels when he sees the evil that is so pervasive in the world. With us, this kind of anger can turn into blaming or hating others but with God, he always exercises it with humility, love and grace.

A sin which makes God very angry is found in many parts of the OT. There's an example in Jeremiah 16:10, "The people ask, "What sin have we committed that the Lord makes such a terrible decree against us?" The Lord replies, "It is because your fathers forsook me and followed other gods. But you have done worse. Each of you follow the stubbornness of your evil heart instead of obeying me."

They turned away from God towards their wealth and their pleasures. So there was a combination of the sins of previous generations as well as their own worse sins. The prophet Hosea records God lamenting, "Be appalled, O heavens and shudder with great horror! My people have committed two sins. They have forsaken me, the spring of living water and they have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

Much of the Old Testament writing about God's anger is coming from his deep distress when people turn to idols and worship them, instead of loving and trusting in Him. This anger of God is righteous anger. He had done everything possible to bless his people but they continually provoked him to jealousy and anger. ⁱ

We have been reminded of other things God hates by today's reading from Proverbs 6: *"Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community."*

We tend to view God as a police officer, who just wants us to obey the law and if we don't, he'll get us. But he's not really after a submissive people who just blindly follow him. He's interested in a relationship with his people. He wants our hearts. No one here wants a relationship with someone who is full of themselves, who tells lies and stirs up conflict. Neither does God.

But the news about God's anger is not all scary and expressed in legal language... Hosea calls to us: "Come let us return to the Lord, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in mercy." God gives a second and a third and many more chances for us to repent. It's never too late - while we still breathe! And David says in Psalm 30, "His anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime."ⁱⁱ Beautiful!

Now let's think about what made God angry as recorded in the New Testament. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul tells us that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God." Father God dwells in unapproachable light, but in order to reconcile the world to himself, he showed what he is like - by coming to dwell among us. We see what the Father is like, by looking at Jesus.

Jesus reached out to take away all the obstacles for anyone who wanted to be part of God's family. One of the times when he got the most angry, is when children were stopped from coming to him. He promised to come down like a ton of bricks on those who harm kids. He says you must become like a little child to enter his kingdom, and he always made room for kids. ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus had no time for people blocking children who wanted to come to him.

A different group of people who made it hard for others to get to God, caused Jesus to overturn tables in the temple twice.^{iv} What was happening was the religious leaders were making money by insisting they were the only people who could supply suitable animals as offerings to God. In other words, poor families who had travelled a long way in order to worship God through sacrifice of an animal, became victims of extortion. They should have been *helped* to worship God in the way God instructed, not hindered.

This is where we see Jesus when he's most obviously intensely angry. He makes a whip and drives the money-hungry profiteers out of the temple area. Why? Because they were making it harder for people to get to God just so they could make a few bucks.

"Oh, I'd never do that," we think. We love to think we are better than others, don't we? *At least I'm not as bad as so and so...* But generally, we aren't as good as we think we are. And Jesus got mad at that kind of superior attitude.

Most commonly, Jesus got mad at the religious leaders because they pretended to be perfect, but in reality, they were just as messed up as everyone else. But they refused to admit and acknowledge their own sin.

Jesus famously called out this hypocrisy by saying, "You wash the outside of the cup but ignore the inside." ^vThey put on a righteous front but ignored the dirtiness of their hearts. They cared more about what people thought of them than what God thought.

It's important to note Jesus wasn't mad at them because of their sinful nature. He was mad because they pretended they were better than they were and used their position of respect to place heavy expectations on other people. They sold animals for sacrifice for a profit, and looked down on those who didn't keep the law as well as they did.

Jesus often got mad when people had ulterior motives or selfish ambitions. He critiques the Pharisees for praying loudly in public^{vi} because they were doing it to be thought spiritual. He values relationship and honesty over an outward appearance of keeping the rules. He healed people on the Sabbath, right in front of the Pharisees.

He got mad when they stuck to the letter of the law but had no compassion for struggling people.

Are you understanding what God values, and what upsets him? Can you tell the difference between righteous, Godly anger and selfish anger that is used to punish and control others? Can you feel the difference between anger that pulls the other person down, and the anger that says, “You are worth more than that! Let me pull you out of that mess.”?

Paul instructs us about the anger of God in his letter to the Romans. “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.^{vii}” That’s a warning that we will be held responsible for our sin, but also, that we can avoid placing ourselves under God’s wrath. Wrath is great anger that expresses itself in punishment of some kind. Later in that letter he says, “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.” This is not an idle threat. The anger of God is a real and terrifying thing. Heb 10:31 says, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

But listen again to Hosea as he calls to us: “Come, let us return to the Lord, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in mercy.”

As I close, I am aware that in our lives we may easily have an area which has given the devil a foothold. This can mean that our anger gets out of control, or just produces really bad outcomes. If that is the case with you, approach a Christian you respect and ask for help. Maybe a home group leader, or Anne or Torben or another leader. James in the 4th chapter of his letter urges us to confess our sins to one another, and to pray for one another, that we may be healed.

This has been a serious subject. Hang in there, because next week at 8am, we will look more deeply at what the Bible shows us about our own ways of dealing with anger and how to do it in a way that pleases God, and overcomes evil.

All scriptural quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*.

ⁱ Jealousy is wanting what belongs to you but envy is wanting what belongs to someone else.

ⁱⁱ Psalms 30:5

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark 9:36-37, Matthew 18:14, Luke 9:47-48

^{iv} John 2:13-17, Matthew 21:12-17

^v Matthew 23:25-32

^{vi} Matthew 6:5

^{vii} Romans 2:5