

“Angry Love”

May 29, 2016

Mark 3:1-6

SCRIPTURE INTRO: I’m preaching a sermon series based on a book by Paul Miller called *Love Walked Among Us*. The subtitle is *Learning to Love Like Jesus*.

What Paul Miller does, and what we’re doing, is look at a bunch of stories in the Gospels where Jesus interacts with people, and look for patterns that emerge that give us insight into how Jesus loved people.

And then we’ll think about how this applies to us and our interactions with people God has put in our lives.

We’re not looking for strategies or steps.

We’re trying to know Jesus better and learn from him.

The more stories we read, the more layers we’ll add to our understanding.

You will start to see some of the things Jesus does over and over—sometimes surprising things that he does, sometimes very direct points that he makes with his disciples or other people.

I hope the Holy Spirit will use this study to make me a more loving person.

And that’s my prayer for you too, for all of us.

INTRO: I know someone who had some sticks and yard debris he wanted to burn. But instead of putting lighter fluid on it, he soaked it with gasoline.

He thought those two fuels would behave the same.

He forgot about that slightly important characteristic known as volatility. When he struck the match it blew him off his feet, singed eyebrows, blistered face.

Anger is certainly the most volatile emotion. It's the gasoline of emotions. People say things and do things in anger that are enormously destructive.

Sometimes, in just a few moments, things are torched beyond repair.

I know a PCA minister who got angry in a Session meeting and said some things he shouldn't have said and then he stormed out and slammed the door.

He realized very soon that even though the other elders might forgive him, he had wrecked their working relationship and ruined their rapport.

He saw the handwriting on the wall and was gone from the church in a month.

We could go around the room and tell stories all day long about how we've seen people in the grip of anger wreck things and people and relationships.

And we could tell how we ourselves have done or said things in anger we regret.

The Bible is full disastrous stories of anger and warnings against anger.

When Jacob was dying, he called his 12 sons to his bedside so he could bless them. But he said to his sons Simeon and Levi, Cursed be your anger. And he reminded them how as angry young men they had killed other men and hamstringed livestock. Moses led Israel 40 years, but the Lord refused to let him enter the Promised Land because of something he did in a single fit of anger.

In the life of King Saul, and David, and Solomon and many of the other kings of Judah and Israel, there were incidents of anger that had profoundly negative impacts on their reigns.

Paul warns the Corinthians against quarreling, jealousy, and outbursts of anger.

He tells the Ephesians to get rid of all rage and anger.

And the Colossians to get rid of anger, rage, malice, and filthy language.

He instructs Timothy to tell the men in his congregation to lift up holy hands in prayer without anger or disputing.

James says man's anger does not bring about the righteous life God desires.

Time and again the Bible presents anger as bad.

But here in Mark 3 we are told that Jesus himself was angry.

It's the only place in all four Gospels where it says that about him.

There are other times when we can assume he was angry—

like when he made a whip out of ropes and drove the moneychangers and their animals out of the temple courts, and overturned their tables.
Or when he called the Pharisees snakes and whitewashed tombs.
But this is the only place we are actually told Jesus was angry.

And what is so striking about this incident, and the reason we are studying it, is because Mark also tells us that as he looked at these men in anger, he was simultaneously grieved over them, grieved over hardness of hearts. You only grieve over things you love.

You only grieve over people or things you care about deeply. We're trying to learn how Jesus loved and what this incident shows us is that sometimes love and anger were comingled in his heart. Sometimes his love was angry and his anger was loving.

There are things for us to learn in this. So let's do three things:

1. Ponder Jesus' anger
2. Ponder Jesus' compassion
3. Put them together for ourselves and learn to love like Jesus

MP#1 First, let's ponder Jesus' anger

When we get angry over big things or little things,

90% of the time it's because something we want is blocked. Selfish.

When a cautious driver in front of me stops early for a yellow light when there is clearly enough time for us both to make it through, I get angry.

I sometimes say out loud: Come on!

I imagine how nice it would be if I was in a tank or bulldozer and I could just keep going and ram them right through the intersection.

The more important that thing we want is to us and the bigger the threat to it, the stronger and longer lasting is our anger.

If you want respect and feel you aren't getting it, you get angry.

If you want peace and quiet and you're being bothered, you get angry.

Most of the times we get angry, if we were really honest with ourselves, we would find one of our idols being threatened, our security, approval, happiness.

But Jesus got angry for a completely different reason.

He was in the synagogue and there was a man with a withered hand.

Luke tells us it was his right hand, which may be a hint this man was a craftsman who had suffered an injury that caused his hand to atrophy and cost livelihood.

One thing we've learned about Jesus from this sermon series is that

he looked at people, his eyes were especially drawn to people in pain.

We know he saw this man and immediately took in his situation.

Jesus also saw his critics there in the synagogue, the Pharisees watching him.

He knew they were going to try to use this situation to provoke a conflict over what you could and couldn't do on the Sabbath.

They did not see the man's withered hand as an opportunity for compassion, they saw it as an opportunity to get an advantage over Jesus.

So what Jesus did was ask the man to stand up in front of everyone. Why?

As I've just reminded you, for Jesus love always began with looking at a person.

I think he wanted them to look at this man because he was hoping it would ignite some compassion in their hearts.

Then Jesus reasoned with them. He appealed to them.

Matthew says Jesus asked them:

If you had a sheep that fell in a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn't you help that sheep?

He wanted them to see that this man was more valuable than an animal.

Then he asked them a question about God's law.

Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life for to kill?

He wanted them to consider how God himself is good and life affirming, so shouldn't your stance toward this man be like God? But their response to Jesus' appeal was silence and their hearts became hardened. Hardened against the love of God, hardened against compassion for this man. That's what made Jesus angry.

He was not angry they had disrespected him personally or that they were trying to get an advantage over him, but that they were treating this man made in God's image, a fellow synagogue member and a fellow son of Abraham as tool for their schemes and would not look with compassion on him.

Another thing about our anger is that we almost always overreact.

We attack people verbally and sometimes physically.

We get much angrier than the situation warrants. We vent.

Our anger is too quick and we don't let it go. We nurse our hurt and keep it alive.

How did Jesus express his anger? He only looked at them in anger.

He did not explode into a verbal attack. He was restrained.

Christ's anger did not control him, he controlled it.

Also, in his anger he never lost sight of what was important—the crippled man.

But our anger often makes us lose sight of what is really important.

Someone told me they were at a sporting event and a child was injured. His father ran on the field and began shouting at the ref for not calling a foul on other player. I've seen Christian parents do the same thing when their child is slighted or treated unfairly—instead of taking this priceless opportunity to say, I know you're hurting, I'm angry at how those kids or that teacher treated you, so we need Jesus. Let's trust him and pray for our enemies like he tells us to.

Instead, spend their angry energy attacking the person who they think did wrong.

What a waste. Not Jesus. He used the energy of his anger to heal.

On the other hand, sometimes depending on our personality or the situation, we pretend like we aren't angry.

Usually then we act it out in subtle ways, comments, slights, or taking out others. Jesus was honest. He didn't try to hide his anger for appearance sake.

A man was being treated wrongly in the synagogue of all places by the religious leaders who should have been the first to show him compassion.

He didn't try to hide his honest anger at this wrong.

We have a lot to learn from Jesus' anger.

We have a lot more to learn from Jesus' compassion.

MP#2 Let's ponder Jesus' compassion

Usually when this passage is studied, the focus is on Jesus' compassion for the man

with the withered hand. But that's not what we're looking at. We're looking at his compassion for his enemies who were trying to trap him. Let me read the key phrase again in verse 5.

He looked around at them in anger, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts . . . NIV
ESV says: grieved at their hardness of heart.

As I've already said, you only grieve over things you love or care about deeply.

You grieve when the people you love are hurt or when they hurt themselves.

This word has a nuance of feeling sorry for, feeling sympathy for.

It doesn't say Jesus was grieved because they didn't listen to him—

he was grieved over the condition of their hearts.

It distressed him, and he felt distress for them, that their hearts were so stubborn and hard against compassion and against all the appeals he made from God's word to break through their hard shell.

So the very thing that moved Jesus to anger—their hard hearts—also moved him to grieve.

Listen to the way a preacher from the 1800s put it.

He looked upon those scribes and Pharisees sitting there with hatred in their eyes and two emotions, which many men suppose as discrepant and incongruous as fire and water rose together in his heart: wrath, which fell on the evil; sorrow, which bedewed the doers of it.

Two emotions as impossible as fire and water together rose in his heart.

Every one of us could tell of a time when we felt compassion or grief for a person just overwhelm us emotionally. I was visiting someone in the hospital recently and she was in such terrible pain that I almost felt physically ill for her.

And every one of us could tell of a time when we felt anger at someone overwhelm us emotionally.

Try to get your mind around this—Jesus had both emotions simultaneously.

How do we account for it?

There's some deep theology at work here..

Jesus was angry at them because they intentionally hardened their hearts against all appeals to sympathy—whether it was the love of God, value of this man.

Why were their hearts hard? Because they hardened them. That made him angry.

That men would intentionally choose to sin against another.

On the other hand, Jesus grieved over them and felt sorry for them because

they were controlled and blinded by their sin. They were, in a sense, victims.

Why were their hearts hard? For the same reason the man's hand was withered.

Because they were living in a fallen world under the curse of sin.

And even though people sin willingly, they are also slaves to it and therefore are not the men and women God made them to be.
That grieved Jesus.

Richard Wurmbrand was a Romanian pastor who spent about 15 years imprisoned and tortured by the Communist government of his home country. In his autobiography he tells the story of a Romanian Christian named Greco who was sentenced to be beaten to death. They would beat the prisoner in a systematic way and revive him between beatings so that the execution would take a full week. It was a terrible way to die. The man overseeing the beating was a Communist official named Reck. Let me read you Wurmbrand's account.

During the beatings, Reck said something to Greco that the Communists often said to Christians, "You know I am God. I have the power of life and death over you. The one who is in heaven cannot decide to keep you in life. Everything depends upon me. If I wish, you live. If I wish, you are killed. I am God!" So he mocked the Christian. Brother Greco, in this horrible situation, gave Reck a very interesting answer, which I afterward heard from Reck himself. He said, "You don't know what a deep thing you have said. Every caterpillar is in reality a butterfly, if it develops rightly. You have not been created to be a torturer, a man who kills. You have been created to become like God, with the life of the Godhead in your heart. Many who have been persecutors like you, have come to realize—like the apostle Paul—that it is shameful for a man to commit atrocities, that they can do much better things. So they have become partakers of the divine nature. Jesus said to the Jews of His time, 'Ye are gods.' Believe me, Mr. Reck, your real calling is to be Godlike—to have the character of God, not a torturer."

There is that deep theology at work.

Anger—you are torturing other men. This is a great evil you have chosen.

Greif and compassion—this is not how you were made.

You were made to be like God.

Oh, what a tragedy to see a human being so warped by hatred and sin.

By the way, you may have caught the reference in the story where Wurmbrand says he heard this story from Reck himself.

Reck the communist torturer was converted through the words of the man he tortured to death, and when he professed his faith he was imprisoned.

That's where Wurmbrand heard his story.

Sometimes God uses our compassion to change people.

MP#3 Now let's put these things together and try to apply to our lives

Let me start with a question:

Do you deserve the angry look of Jesus? Yes, you do. And I do.

Because all too often, our hearts have been hard toward God and other people. Like the Pharisees, we've been intent on our schemes and uncompassionate. The really sobering fact is that when Jesus returns, his angry look will be the first stroke of his judgment against everyone who is unrepentant.

In the book of Revelation, chapter 6, John has a vision of the Second Coming.

He describes the clouds being rolled back like a scroll.

And then he describes all sorts of people, from the greatest to the least, the rich and powerful and the poor hiding from Jesus and John hears them calling out to the mountains and the rocks:

“Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!”

The wrath of the Lamb—it's the very same word Mark uses in this story to describe Jesus' angry look at the Pharisees. It was a wrathful look.

Where did Mark get the material for his Gospel? He got it from Peter.

The Gospel of Mark is essentially Peter's memoirs.

He told his remembrances to Mark, who later assembled them and wrote down.

Isn't it interesting that decades after this event Peter remembered that look of anger on Jesus' face? It must have been an awful look.

Peter must have shivered a bit and been thankful he wasn't on receiving end.

It made an impression on him that he never forgot.

But that day in the synagogue Jesus' look of anger was tempered with compassion, because he did not come to condemn the world but to save the world.

And we are still living in an age of grace.

God is withholding his anger. He wants all people to be saved.

However, the day is coming when Christ will return,

and on that day the anger of his face will no longer be tempered by compassion because the day of grace will be over.

And everyone then who is unrepentant and hard hearted

would rather have mountains fall on them than to see his angry face.

But if you're trusting Jesus, you've been delivered from his angry look.

Instead, he'll shout: Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things! Enter into your master's happiness!

And you will meet him in the air

and enjoy forever the goodness of his compassion and love.

I'm telling you all this because anger is the gasoline of emotions.

The only way you can possibly learn to control your anger and temper it with

compassion, is to realize you've been delivered from an even more volatile anger. You've been delivered from the wrath of the Lamb.

How wrong of you to get angry when your selfish desires are blocked.

How wrong of you to overreact and attack people, and to waste the energy of your anger on that attack, rather than using it for good.

Wrong because Jesus didn't treat you that way.

And if you've been the recipient of such compassion and grace,

then how can you not be distressed over people you meet who are the willing victims of their own hard hearts?

Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Now, we've looked at some extreme examples.

The Pharisees who wanted to murder Jesus. A Communist prison torturer.

Those aren't our everyday experiences, those sorts of people.

You might encounter great evil, but for most of us, it's more mundane things.

The ordinary sins and meanness of human life.

It's family members, our own children or spouses, or co-workers,

or Christian friends and members of our church who do things that make angry.

Let me give you one practical application to think about and maybe even

put to use. When you get angry with someone, ask Lord to give compassion.

Lord, give me compassion. If person doing wrong, distress me over it.

And when he does, and when you've let that grief and compassion sink in for a while, if there is still something that bothers you, something you don't think is right, something this person is doing that is harming himself or other people—then speak to him or her about it.

Share your concerns because you love the person.

Not just to get something off your chest.

Use the energy of your anger to be honest with the person and risk disapproval, but pray, pray, pray, that your anger won't control you.