

August 18, 2024 Sermon Manuscript

Mark 11:15-19 (NIV)

¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”

¹⁸ The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

¹⁹ When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Anger at Injustice (Dealing With Anger, Pt 2)

This morning I want to share part two of my teaching on anger. Those of you who were here last week recall I was prompted to preach on this by a situation in my own life where anger arose in me - as I described me debacle involving two cell phone providers - and two verses appointed last week from Ephesians 4, where St Paul writes, “²⁶ *“In your anger do not sin”*: *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,* ²⁷ *and do not give the devil a foothold,*” and then “³¹ *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*” And one thing we made clear last week was that the emotion or feeling of anger is not a sin; and the beginning of verse 26 supports this.

Instead, the feeling of anger within us is **a gift**, because it alerts us that something is wrong in a situation or within us. But where anger *becomes* sin is when we respond to that feeling in a way that does harm to us or others. And so, once again, the good news today is that God wants to teach us how to receive our anger as a gift, but to respond to it in the way of love and not cause harm.

Now, the reason I’m preaching on this again today is because last week we weren’t able to cover all the different causes for anger to arise in us. But, as a brief review the causes of anger we *did* cover, including:

From last week...

(Read or watch the 8/11 sermon at www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/anger)

- **Face your anger, but not alone, to discern its cause >**
- **Causes of Anger + Godly Response**
 - Anger because we aren’t getting our way
 - If our way is loving/unselfish, don’t seek to control outcomes, but call-in and then lament undesired outcomes.
 - If our way is selfish/unloving, repent of the lie believed / surrender selfish desire, then forgive.
 - Anger when we are sinned against (Mt 18:15-17,21-22)
 - Forgive > Share hurt with offender where safe to do so > employ appropriate boundaries with respect to reconciliation

Now, the reason I’m preaching on this again today is because last week we weren’t able to cover all the different causes for anger to arise in us. But, as a brief review the causes of anger we *did* cover, including:

1. When we get angry because we aren’t getting our way, when our way is loving or unselfish;
2. When we get angry because we aren’t getting our way, when our way is selfish or unloving;
3. And when we get angry in response to someone sinning against us.

And we noted that in order to identify which of these is the cause of our anger in a given situation - or whether it’s something else like we’ll cover today - we really can’t do this alone - we’re so prone to self-deception ((in our sin)) that we really need to seek the perspective of God (in prayer) or a fellow wise believer to identify the true cause of our anger. And only after we’ve identified the cause can we discern how to respond to it - how to deal with it - in a way that is loving to others & ourselves and doesn’t cause harm. And, what is a loving, godly response differs based on what the *cause* of our anger is. The good news is that God wants to teach us how to receive our anger as a gift, but to respond to it in the way of love and not cause harm.

But, moving forward today, we're going to turn our attention to another potential cause for anger to arise in us, which is when we witness **the misuse of power by some against others who are less powerful**, which is pretty much a definition for injustice: **when those with more power misuse it to exploit or victimize those who are less powerful**. When we encounter or become aware of this occurring, we should expect our love to manifest as anger, because anger is how love responds to evil. Examples of such injustice include:

- sex abuse in the Church - whether Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, or any church in between, including our denomination, the ACNA;
- or when a phone scammer manipulates a vulnerable person into sending them cash for a bogus reason;
- when corporations prioritize their own profits & their stockholders over the well-being of their customers or workers
- when politicians, cable news, talk radio, and internet outlets manipulate people and exploit their fears using - or half-truths - and even conspiracy theories
- When prejudice leads to the mistreatment of a people group

And, of course, we could go on and on. When those with more power misuse it to exploit or victimize those who are less powerful, it is completely appropriate - and righteous - to feel angry about that. Lord knows God is angry about it.

Now, last week I mentioned that we see Jesus getting angry on multiple occasions in the gospels. And Matt Tebbe of Gravity Commons has compiled a list of these.¹ So, in these examples we see Jesus not just angry but expressing anger or even acting in it. But what I want you to notice is that in every case Jesus is angry about people suffering at the hand of someone - or something - more powerful than them.

- A. Now, the Mark 1 example is kind of interesting, because there Jesus was "indignant" - angry - about a man being plagued by a skin disease.²
 - a. So, here the power that's victimizing someone is not another person, but an illness. But this illness was surely more powerful than this man and was surely victimizing him, and not only with physical discomfort. Remember, in those days such a disease would keep him from participating in both the Jewish religious practices and community life. So Jesus' anger at how this disease moved Jesus to heal him.
- B. Next, in Mark 3 (v5) Jesus was angry at the religious leaders' opposition to Him healing a disabled person on the sabbath.³
 - a. This makes Him angry because it revealed these leaders' interest was really in exercising their religious authority to control people rather than promote their flourishing. So, Jesus healed the man on the sabbath right in front of them. (Mic drop!)
- C. Then, Mark 9 describes how Jesus got upset because His own disciples were caught up arguing with religious leaders while a father stood by with his suffering son (v19), whom

¹ Matt Tebbe, "How to Get Angry Like Jesus," August 19, 2021, <https://gravitycommons.com/how-to-get-angry-with-jesus/>

² From MARK 1:

⁴⁰ A man with leprosy came to (Jesus) and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." ⁴¹ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed."

³ From MARK 3:

⁴ Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. ⁵ He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. ⁶ Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus."

they had failed to heal because they'd been full of themselves and had failed to pray for God's help.⁴

- a. So the disciples had misused the authority Jesus gave them to heal the sick, and this sick boy was continuing to suffer as a result.⁵
- D. Fourth, in Mark chapter 10, Jesus gets angry at his disciples again: this time for telling people that Jesus didn't have time for their children (v14).⁶
- a. They were misusing their status as Jesus' disciples to keep powerless children away from Jesus. There was a pretty low view of the worth of children in those days. And so, Jesus rebukes them and then demonstrates one way children are so valuable, by holding them up as a model for the disposition all of us must have to receive His Kingdom, "for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."
- E. But a final example of Jesus' anger manifesting is, of course, in His clearing the temple courts of moneychangers and merchants.⁷
- a. These people represented a system that financially exploited those who - were mostly poor and - wanted to make the regular sacrifices God had appointed for them in scripture.⁸

⁴ From MARK 9:

¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ¹⁶ "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked. ¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." ¹⁹ "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." ²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. ²² "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." ²³ "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" ²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." ²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. ²⁸ After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" ²⁹ He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

⁵ Ironically, if they had healed the sick boy, it would've been a more powerful indictment of the religious leaders' impotent ministry than winning any debate ever would.

⁶ From Mark 10:

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

⁷ Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48, & John 2:13-16

⁸ Money-changing and the purchase of sacrificial doves were a two step process that worshippers would go through in order to make a sacrifice. But to say the prices were inflated would be an understatement. The mark-up on these sacrificial birds was 100 times what it should have been - and the money went straight into the priests' pockets - but this left the majority of worshippers with a dilemma: either impoverish themselves further or feel shameful & unacceptable to God. And this sort of financial and religious abuse - propped up by corrupt politics - is what Jesus was disrupting when he turned over those tables. Almost everything about the Temple in Jesus' day had become exploitative and failed to treat the people and their needs as holy. And Jesus has had enough.

However, by demonstrating outrage over this, Jesus was not expressing a new concern for God. No, this was completely consistent with the Lord's concern for the foreigner and the fatherless and the widow revealed throughout the Old Testament. As Obery Hendricks explains, the Old Testament concept of justice - the Hebrew word *mishpat* - was all about restoring and maintaining fairness and equity in society. And this is reflected in the three major law codes found the Old Testament, which had the distinct focus of preventing exploitation. Just look at some of what these law codes required (on your insert or on the screen). They...

- Forbade the charging of interest to poor borrowers (Exodus 22:25)
- Protected the poor from exploitation by requiring just weights
- Safeguarded the dignity of debtors by forbidding creditors to accost them at their homes
- Protected the earnings of hired servants by providing that wages be paid on the day they are earned

- b. But I mentioned last week that, when Jesus did this, He was not acting in what Ephesians 4:31 refers to rage; as He was not out of control. Nor was He even acting in wrath,⁹ seeking to harm these moneychangers and merchants. Instead, Jesus was performing a prophetic act that named the evil they were participating in and disrupted it. And more on that in a sec...

But all of this is instructive then for when anger arises in us at the misuse of power against others (injustice).

- First, as always, we take that anger to God or another wise believer to confirm that's what our anger is about and that we're reading the situation correctly. And if the cause is truly about misuse of power, we can expect to feel the Lord's *anguish* at the situation, and not even just for the victimized, but the victimizers who are caught up in sin.
- But once we identify this is the cause, with help from the same source we can seek to discern how we might respond.
 - If it's not something we can do anything about, our only response is to lament, to grieve the injustice with God or another, and to seek solidarity with the victimized where we can or when God shows us a way to.

So, for example, the other day when I heard (from a credible source) that right now in the U.S. individuals in the top 1 percent of income brackets earn over 100 times more than those in the bottom 20 percent, who struggle to make ends meet.¹⁰ This is unjust in the eyes of the Lord,¹¹ and hearing it made me angry - I knew the income disparity was larger than ever before, but hearing those numbers got me worked up. However, I also don't really have the power to disrupt this unjust situation, other than naming & lamenting this evil before God and others - with you right here. But we mustn't underestimate the value of lament,¹² not just to dissipate our anger & anguish, but that God might even answer our prayer and move on the hearts of the unjust or disrupt them Himself!

Though, in addition to lament, I can also ask God to give me the imagination for how I might stand in solidarity with those - or someone most victimized by this injustice, *if He's calling me to do so*: none of us has the bandwidth to take action with regard to every evil out there and taking action must always be weighed in tension our responsibilities to others. But standing in solidarity with someone who's being victimized can look like providing help & care (within healthy boundaries) where God gives us the means

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- Specifically forbidding perversions of justice against the poor (Exodus 23:6)
 - Prohibiting partiality and bribes in the courts because such actions inevitably inured to the benefit of the rich (Deuteronomy 1:17; Leviticus 19:15)
 - Instructed that truly needy persons be lent whatever they required, with any outstanding balance to be forgiven after seven years (like I mentioned earlier)
 - Instituted the year of Jubilee, the end of a fifty-year cycle, where all land was returned to the original owners
 - Allowed for the poor to bring less expensive sacrifices to the Temple

(From 3/7/21 sermon)

⁹ The Greek word translated "rage" in Eph 4:31 can also be translated wrath.

¹⁰ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/jamie-dimon-on-how-economic-inequality-fueled-political-polarization-and-what-can-be-done>

¹¹ A few relevant scriptures:

- Prov 13:23 - *"The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice"* (Proverbs 13:23)
- Leviticus 25:35 - ³⁵ *"If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you."*
- ¹ Timothy 6:17-19 - ¹⁷ *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.* ¹⁸ *Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.* ¹⁹ *In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

¹² And there's a whole book of the Bible called Lamentations, and many psalms, that model this for us.

and opportunity to do so, but it probably starts with just being present to their pain: listening and extending compassion. The good news is that God wants to teach us how to receive our anger as a gift, but to respond to it in the way of love and not cause harm.

So, when it's an injustice we have no power to disrupt, the only recourse we really have is to grieve it, to lament with God or others, and ask God for imagination on how to stand in solidarity with the victimized. But when we **do** have the capacity to disrupt the situation, we do so by calling all parties - victimizer and victim - out of the injustice and into God's Kingdom way. And we do this by Naming the Evil, Disrupting the Evil and Advocating for the Vulnerable where we can (or Live in Solidarity with them when we can't).

- So, taking what Jesus does in the temple as an example...
 - In verse 17 Jesus names the evil going on there when He says that it is written “‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”
 - But in verse 15 He literally disrupts the injustice going on by driving the oppressors and overturning their tables. Though, notice that Jesus doesn't *harm* them. I'm sure they probably all came right back to set up shop again at the next opportunity. Calling people into the Kingdom never controls outcomes. But Jesus had done this: His prophetic act called the victimizers out of their sin against others and into the Kingdom way. And yet, this action was also a sign to the victims: demonstrating that they didn't have to go along with this price gouging to make sacrifices to God, that what was being done to them did *not* represent God's heart. And they could instead follow Him, and *He* would never exploit them.¹³

So Jesus gets angry at an injustice that He can do something about, and so He disrupts the evil and names it to all parties, calling them all out of the unjust system. The good news is that God wants to teach us how to receive our anger at exploitation and victimization as a gift, and to disrupt harm where we have the means to do so.

So, beginning to cultivate an imagination for how we might respond in a situations where we discern our anger provoked by injustice - big or small - and we do have the authority or opportunity to disrupt it: we can follow the example of Jesus. Not just in His cleansing of the temple, but in **all five examples** we listed Jesus **disrupted and named** the evil or wrong being perpetrated to call all parties involved into God's kingdom way.

On a macro, societal level, we can see this sort of disruptive, prophetic act in our nation's history with what the Reverend Martin Luther King did through peaceful protest in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Through public actions like writing his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”,¹⁴ gathering a quarter-million people on the National Mall to protest job discrimination against people of color,¹⁵ and leading the three marches from Montgomery to Selma to protest the systemic racism of Jim Crow laws in the South,¹⁶ King was calling the powers who were perpetuating this oppression into a more just way *and he was also* restoring a sense of dignity to the many who were oppressed, which had been systematically taken from them over generations. His leadership showed his people that they had just as much worth and value to God as their oppressors. And while this movement did not fix all systemic racism in our country, it certainly made an important dent in it.

¹³ And Jesus actually continued to live in solidarity with them by prioritizing His ministry to the least of these, those who had been failed and exploited by political and religious power.

¹⁴ <https://bri-wp-images.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/Letter-From-Birmingham-Jail.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.nps.gov/articles/march-on-washington.htm#:~:text=It%20was%20the%20largest%20gathering.from%20all%20over%20the%20country.>

¹⁶ <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/vote/selma-marches>

But participating in non-violent protests with both believers and non-believers *is* one way that we can participate in prophetic acts that disrupt the macro, societal injustices that provoke the Lord's anger in us. The good news is that God wants to teach us how to receive our anger at exploitation and victimization as a gift, and to disrupt harm where we have the means to do so.

But Jesus' model in these five passages not only applies to how we respond to exploitation or victimization on these big, societal levels. The cleansing of the temple might model that for us, but in at least three of the examples we looked at Jesus is responding in anger toward individuals or a small group, like his disciples, who are misusing their power. And it's on this level - when God's anger (and anguish) is provoked in us about someone right in front of us being victimized - it's on this level that we can make the most difference, but perhaps need the most courage.

And we're all going to encounter such situations in our lives. For example,

- If we see a parent being harsh or even cruel with a child, perhaps even someone we're close to. But are we willing to ruffle feathers or do we just decide just mind our own business?¹⁷
- Or when someone's taking advantage of an elderly person financially and we can safely intervene by naming the evil to both parties and saying it's wrong, or in the least make an elder abuse report.
- Or we might witness a religious leader, or even fellow parishioner, dehumanize or some group of people in the name of morals and righteousness.¹⁸
 - With this one, perhaps we just lack the imagination for what disrupting this could look like in a way that isn't calling them out, but calling them in? On that note, one question I find helpful in situations like this that is non-condemning, but invites someone caught up in judgment to re-align with God's heart is just to ask: "I wonder if there is another way to look at that *from God's perspective?*"

But perhaps there is some circumstance in the orbit of your life even right now where you've thought, "That's just not right" or "It shouldn't be that way." Would you ask God for the wisdom about whether there is some way you can intervene and the courage to do it? Or would you ask as Him to give you that the next time you are confronted by someone in your orbit mistreating someone less powerful than them? The good news is that God wants to teach us how to receive our anger at exploitation and victimization as a gift, and to disrupt harm where we have the means to do so. #

Next week I want to get into a final potential cause for our anger to be provoked, which is when we are the ones being victimized or exploited. I didn't mean for it to, but this turned into a three-part sermon series. But today, let's ask the Lord to help us respond as He would in situations where those with less power are being mistreated by those with more.

Will you pray with me?

Lord, we thank you for the gift of Your anger that arises in us when we're confronted with evil or wrong. When we discern this is the cause of our anger, fill us with your anguish for the harm being done and give us vision for how we might contribute to that harm being disrupted where we can and where we cannot disrupt, help us to minister your love & concern; for we know that whatever we do to the least of these we do unto you.¹⁹ In the name of the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

¹⁷ This is an example of "grace" without "truth".

¹⁸ An example of "truth" without "grace".

¹⁹ Mt 25:31-46