

## Scripture Readings

### Matthew 5:21-22

*21"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,[a] and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother[b]will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,[c]' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

Matthew 5:21 Exodus 20:13

Matthew 5:22 Some manuscripts brother without cause

Matthew 5:22 An Aramaic term of contempt

## Message

### The Good & Beautiful Life: Life without Anger

One morning, a Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her class of five and six-year-olds. After explaining the commandment to honor thy father and thy mother, she asked, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?" Without missing a beat, one little boy answered, "Thou shall not kill."

For sure!

How true!!

“Thou shall not kill.”.. a good rule to live by for siblings as well as all humankind.

And yet, today we are reminded that Jesus calls us to **more** in His Sermon on the Mount. He is not calling us to a greater legalistic lifestyle where our actions are constantly being evaluated as “kosher” or “defiled”; “good enough” or “not enough”. Jesus is calling us to experience more of LIFE than simply keeping the rules; a LIFE only made possible by God’s grace and power at work within us.

When Jesus said....

**Matthew 11:29**

*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

.. He was throwing down the gauntlet; he was speaking to a culture burdened by the heavy yoke of the Law.. people who had taken God’s Commandments, expanded them, and had declared them a means by which human beings could earn their own salvation. This was the teaching.. the heavy “yoke” of the religious leaders of His day. And Jesus was throwing down the gauntlet and challenging it with truth.

Although the Psalms, indeed the Old Testament stories and teachings shouted the message that salvation was only from God, something for which we are to trust Him..... humanity did it again; they made it all about us and our abilities;

- how good we could become by keeping the law
- how pure we could make their hearts,
- how free we can make ourselves from the temptations of life.

They just refused to accept the truth proclaimed in scripture that:

**Romans 3:23**

*...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

>>> The “yoke” which Jesus invites his listeners to “put on” was His teachings, proclaiming the great news that salvation is from God, and it is ours if we simply trust in Him; if we simply believe that God has come to us in Jesus Christ and has died for our sins.

Our message is simple, it is straightforward.

*You can't do it, but God can, and did in Jesus.*

*All you can do is to accept that.*

The message is simple & clear, but it is so hard for so many to accept, because they have allowed their actions and abilities to define them, and they simply cannot accept any brokenness, or any limitations to what they can accomplish.

Jesus' "yoke", his teachings, were a threat to the religious community because the religious community had defined themselves by their righteousness. And, they controlled their community by defining life in terms of righteous acts.

But Jesus' teaching was different. He did not come to abolish God's law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17); and to point to a righteousness that was greater than that of the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). In fact these are the words of Jesus directly before today's text:

### **Matthew 5:17-20**

*<sup>17</sup>"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup>I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. <sup>19</sup>Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup>For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

The wonderful corrective Jesus brought to our world.. the "Good News" we get to pass on to our neighbors, friends, relatives burdened by

Pharisaic teachings of an impossible self-righteousness and devoid of salvation by the grace of God, is that by God's actions in Jesus, and by the power of His Spirit working within us, we are saved, and we can discover a LIFE that is lived above the letter of the Law.

Today we discover a greater life which is found beyond that kind of life defined by "not murdering someone". Imagine a husband and wife checking in with each other at the end of a busy day.

"And how was your day dear?"

"Well darling, it was just wonderful; I didn't murder a single person!"

"Wow, great job, what a wonderful life we have!!"

Do you hear what I am trying to say?

Jesus wants us to discover a LIFE that is only found when we live above the letter of the law...a life where we not only "do not murder", but a life where, by the power of God's Spirit, we can deal with our anger and avoid all the destruction anger brings to our world.

And it is not just murder and anger. In the weeks ahead we will discover Jesus calling his followers to consider the spirit of the laws and apply them to all their behavior. He is calling us to live above the law. He is calling us to experience life at a whole new level.

Such LIFE will make obedient Christians stand out from the rest of the world. (Light shine.. salt preserve)

**In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is calling for us to live above the Law, and to love like God loves.**

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Now before we seek to understand the anger we are called to avoid, we must acknowledge that **while most anger is destructive to life, a specific kind of anger is actually good and godly.**

Throughout the Old Testament God regularly showed anger not only against the antagonists of His chosen people, but even against the Israelites themselves. For **God's anger is a righteous anger which opposes anyone responsible for injustice.**

This godly anger is a very appropriate response even when we encounter injustice. But as we are reminded of in both the Old and New Testaments, in our anger we are not to sin. (Psalm 4:3-4 & Ephesians 4:26-27.)

So the real issue before us is not avoiding anger totally, but controlling righteous anger which opposes the injustices of this world.

Perhaps you have already brought to mind how Jesus modeled this control of anger during his ministry. Perhaps you recall.....

### **Mark 3:1-6**

*<sup>1</sup>Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. <sup>2</sup>Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.*

*<sup>3</sup>Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand,  
"Stand up in front of everyone."*

*<sup>4</sup>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.*

*<sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.*

Or more likely you recalled.

### **Matthew 21:12-13**

*<sup>12</sup>Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. <sup>13</sup>"It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,'<sup>[a]</sup> but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'<sup>[b]</sup>"*

Jesus' actions affirm that a righteous anger is pleasing to God, even though it enraged the religious leaders. We must be courageous to make stands against injustice, yet as we reveal such anger we must not sin.

So now that we acknowledged our need to demonstrate but control our anger against injustice, how can we deal with the unnecessary and destructive anger that more commonly wells up within us?

To do so, James Bryan Smith suggests that we recognize **two main causes of unnecessary anger**. Individually they can lead to anger, but if they occur together, anger is even more likely and more heated.

The first cause is..

### **1. Unmet Expectations**

Have you ever found yourself getting angry when something doesn't happen, or a person doesn't behave the way you expected? You find yourself waiting for someone; their late and you feel anger growing within you?

Crazy things happen to our sense of judgment when we get angry about such things:

.

In February 2009, a 27-year-old woman from Fort Pierce, Florida, walked into a McDonald's and ordered a 10-piece Chicken McNugget meal.

You know how it is when you're hungry and you have a taste for something particular. Your imagination starts working and you can almost taste those McNuggets now.

Well, that's when things got really tough for this hungry woman. The person behind the counter took the order and received payment. The McDonald's employee then discovered that they were out of those bite-sized, warm, tasty McNuggets. (anger) The employee told the customer that the restaurant had run out of McNuggets, and she would have to get something else from the menu. The customer asked for her money back. The employee said all sales are final, and she could have a larger priced item from the menu if she wanted. (more anger)

Anger was about to turn into action. She wanted McNuggets—not a Big Mac, not a McRib, not a Quarter Pounder. She was angry, this was clearly an emergency, and she knew what to do in an emergency:

**DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED?**

She took out her cell phone and called 911 to complain!

Apparently the 911 workers didn't take her seriously; because the McNuggets-loving woman called 911 three times to get help! She never got her McNuggets that night, but she did later get a ticket from police for misusing 911.

Anger twists our perspective. It skews our judgment. Anger makes small things big. When we're angry, having to eat a burger instead of McNuggets is a disaster, and calling 911 is not a big deal.

Craig Brian Larson, editor of PreachingToday.com; source: Associated Press, "Florida woman calls 911 3 times over McNuggets," [www.news.yahoo.com](http://www.news.yahoo.com) (3-4-09)

What are your unmet expectations?

Have you ever allowed the anger generated from them, cause you to sin; to belittle a waitress, to swear at a motorist, to lose a lifelong friend because they were late?

Be careful... unmet expectations can easily generate an anger that leads to sin.

The second common cause of anger is..

## **2. Fear**

Now what I am talking about here is a variety of fears:

- Anything that threatens us: darkness for a toddler, nuclear weapons for adults, these threats generate fear.

- But there are also social fears...fear of being alone, fears of losing a job, fears of illnesses, fears of commitment... all these things can cause a person to become angry.

- And there are of course psychological fears: fear of not being respected, fear of losing control, fear of humiliation, fear of looking foolish. These are real fears, and how often are they discovered when someone begins counseling to talk about their anger?

Fears regularly generates anger.

Justin Boudin, a 27-year-old man from Minnesota, pleaded guilty to fifth-degree assault charges for violently losing his temper.

According to the criminal complaint, Boudin was waiting at a bus stop on his way to an evening class when he started to harass a 59-year-old woman. Witnesses say he yelled at her over what he felt was a general lack of respect. When she took out her cell phone to call police, Boudin punched her in the face. When a 63-year-old man tried to stop him, Boudin hit him with a blue folder that held his class homework. Police were able to track him down by using the papers that fell on the floor.

Now here's the irony in this sad story: Justin Boudin was on his way to anger management class when he committed the crime.

Associated Press, "Man Hits Woman On Way To Anger Control Class," [www.msnbc.com\(mod](http://www.msnbc.com(mod)

This is not the kind of life God wants us to read about, much less experience. But when fear of losing people's respect leads to anger and anger leads to sin, life falls terribly short of the abundant LIFE Jesus offers us.

What "fears" cause anger to well up in you, tempting you to sin?

- Terrorism can rob us of LIFE, if we let it.
- Our uncertain economic times can generate fear.
- Being disrespected ("dissed") have lead to many a violent confrontation in the city streets, post offices and in office complexes.

We need to understand what triggers our anger. **What causes us to fear? What causes us to experience unmet expectations?** My assignment for you this week is to make two lists, so that you become more aware of those things which anger you... things which, with God's help we can overcome!

Now if it true that these two factors contribute to the majority of the anger we see in this world, and we feel anger rising up with ourselves, how does God's Word help us to "counter" or "diminish" these factors and thus help us to experience LIFE without this destructive kind of anger?

### **Biblical Solutions to Anger**

We receive some very practical advice in

#### **Galatians 5:16-18**

*16So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*

*18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

The tension described here by the Apostle Paul is that between living by one's own resources verses living by God's resources. The current human "default position" is to wander from God and try to solve problems on their own, relying upon human capacities. But, if we oppose that default position and instead yield ourselves to God, we can then be "led by the Spirit".

And a wonderful thing happens when we “live by the spirit”; our perspectives change from those of this world to those of God’s Kingdom.

1. The fear that can come when the world makes you feel “all alone”, diminishes when you realize that you are never alone because Jesus is always with you.
2. The anger which normally arises when you lose control over a situation, will not arise when you have faith that Jesus is in control.
3. In this world we tend to believe the false narrative that “something terrible will happen to us if we make a mistake”, but as we see affirmed over and over again in the scriptures, God’s children make mistakes, but God will work things out for those who trust in Him.

**Romans 8:28**

*...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,<sup>[j]</sup> who<sup>[k]</sup> have been called according to his purpose.*

4. The world also tries hard to make this life fair and just, but from a Kingdom perspective we recognize the truth that this life is not always fair and just, but that God will get the last word on all things! We don’t need to let anger rule over us, causing us to sin because things are not right in this world.

5. And then, how often does the world demand perfection? (I cringe when I encounter parents who demand perfection from their children... RX for anger) But how often do Christians celebrate that Jesus accepts us even though we are not perfect.

In summary, **Christians can live with less anger in their lives because their reality is based on the presence and power of God.**

- Outside the Kingdom of God people must protect themselves, fight for their rights and punish those who offend them, but

- Simply knowing that God is with us, protecting us and fighting for our well-being has a very practical way of diminishing our anger.

And there is very good reason why God wants us to control our anger. Can we even begin to imagine all the talent and giftedness lost into the American jail system simply because in the heat of anger someone attacked or killed another person? When our emotions get the best of us we say things we regret, we do things we cannot undo.

Is there anyone here today who does not wish they could take back some words or actions which, offered in anger, hurt someone else deeply? Jesus understood this fine line between anger and murder, and He called us to discover life above the letter of the law. Not only “do not murder”, but avoid the sin that comes when we allow anger to rule over us.

Are you familiar with Dr. Ben Carson?

After successfully separating numerous Siamese twins and continuing to refine the techniques of several complicated surgeries, Dr. Ben Carson has become known throughout the world as a premiere neurosurgeon.

What many do not know is that because of an uncontrollable temper as a child, Dr. Carson's career was almost over before it began. In his book *Take the Risk*, Dr. Carson writes about the day he invited God to help him deal with this critical character flaw:

*One day, as a 14-year-old in ninth grade, I was hanging out at the house of my friend Bob, listening to his radio, when he suddenly leaned over and dialed the tuner to another station. I'd been enjoying the song playing on the first station, so I reached over and flipped it back. Bob switched stations again.*

*A wave of rage welled up. Almost without thinking, I pulled out the pocketknife I always carried and, in one continuous motion, flicked open the blade and lunged viciously right at my friend's stomach. Incredibly, the point of the knife struck Bob's large metal buckle and the blade snapped off in my hands.*

*Bob raised his eyes from the broken piece of metal in my hand to my face. He was too surprised to say anything. But I could read the terror in his eyes.*

*"I...I...I'm sorry!" I sputtered, then dropped the knife and ran for home, horrified by the realization of what I'd just done.*

*I burst into our empty house, locked myself in the bathroom, and sank to the floor, miserable and frightened. I could no longer deny that I had a severe anger problem, and that I'd never achieve my dream of being a doctor with an uncontrollable temper. I admitted to myself there was no way I could control it by myself. "Lord, please, you've got to help me," I prayed. "Take this temper away! You promised that if I ask anything in faith, you'll do it. I believe you can change me."*

*I slipped out and got a Bible. Back on the bathroom floor, I opened to the Book of Proverbs. The words of Proverbs 16:32—"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city"—convicted me, but also gave me hope. I felt God telling me that although he knew everything about me, he still loved me... That because he made me, he was the only one who could change me... And that he would. Gradually I stopped crying, my hands quit shaking, and I was filled with the assurance that God had answered my prayer.*

Dr, Ben Carlson, a 2008 recipient of the Presidents Medal of Freedom, then writes:

*Uncontrolled anger has never again been a threat to me or those around me. God has provided and will provide whatever strength I need to control my anger.*

Ben Carson, Take the Risk (Zondervan, 2008); as quoted in the May 3 and 4 entries of Men of Integrity (May/June 2009) mod.

How easily Ben Carlson could have been a jail inmate rather than a life-giving gift from God to us.

I am fairly certain that none of us here today have ever murdered anyone. And that is a good thing. You have kept the law.

But, how about your anger?

Have you ever gotten angry at someone; not because of an injustice but because something unexpected happened or something cause you to experience fear? Did your anger cause you to harm another, or even yourself?

Today Jesus calls us to life above the letter of the law... a life we can experience when we know, accept and act upon God's love and God's salvation.

Let us trust in Him to give us abundant life.

Let us turn to Him when feelings of anger arise within us,

and let Him transform anger against others into trust in Him.

Let us reveal to the world a new way of living;

a light, witnessing to the fact that we are followers of Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. AMEN

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV).  
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