

March 17, 2013

Scripture Reading
Matthew 5:21-22

²¹ *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*

²⁸ *“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Morning Message
"House Cleaning: Time to Throw Out Some Junk"
#4 - Toxic Emotions: Anger & Fear

Welcome to week-four of our Lenten journey of messages titled "House Cleaning". The Lenten Season has traditionally been that time for Christians to do some serious introspection as we symbolically walk with our Lord to the cross. It is a time to recognize, confess and repent of those things that distance us from God, things we collectively know as sins.

And, while Lent may be a time when you traditionally give-up something important to you, to better connect with the suffering of Jesus (I've heard stories this year ofchocolate, potato chips, texting, marshmallow peeps); whatever those things may be, our "House Cleaning" messages are challenging us to dig deeper; to wrestle more earnestly with those sins that still keep us from experience the kind of intimacy with God that has been offered to us through Jesus Christ.

And so in the past few weeks we've examined

- a self-deceptive nature; our reluctance to notice & name our sins.
- We've talked about the power of thoughts, words and deeds to either glorify God or to deeply wound one another and the world in which we live.
- And last week we talk about two toxic emotions; resentment and envy; and the power they have to turn our eyes and hearts toward what others have; thus defining our wants, while minimizing everything God has given us for life; things worthy of endless praise & thanksgiving.

So in this 4th week, we turn our minds and hearts to some additional toxic emotions that can damage not only our relationship with God but others as well. Perhaps you know them: Anger and Fear, and its close friend “worry”?

1. Anger

So what gets you angry?

Burnt toast in the morning,

Kids running late for school

Interruptions in cable service during your favorite show

No dessert in the house.

A couple years ago Bill Hybels (Pastor of Willow Creek, Chicago) told a story about a visit to the driving range, to warm up for the golfing season. When he got there he noticed that the “distance flags” had not been put out yet, but he still hit his bucket of balls and began heading home. But before he left he heard someone swearing at the young man working the range. This worker was out in one of those caged-up carts pulling a ball-collector behind him. This angry man was shouting as he drove by “Where are the flags? Why aren’t they up yet? This is unbelievable!”

“This is unbelievable!” the red-faced man kept shouting.

To which Bill wanted to respond, “Missing distance flags, unbelievable”? Millions starving from hunger while others grow obese, that’s unbelievable. Or soldiers dying in the Middle East while their leaders refuse to meet and hammer out a piece treaty; now that unbelievable!”

But distance flags? Can we please get a perspective on anger!

So what is it that gets you angry in his world?

Unlike the toxic emotions of resentment and envy, anger is not in and of itself sinful. Like money, which has the potential to either serve God's Kingdom or pull one's self away from God with a false sense of self-sufficiency, so also anger can either serve God's purposes or get in the way of intimacy with God.

Groeschel notes in his book, *Soul Detox*, that anger is paired up with the image of fire 15 times in the scriptures.

In noting that, Groeschel makes the same point, that while fire can be a controlled force for good (cooking food, boiling water, heating homes), it can also be an extremely destructive force when out-of-control.

Fire and anger pair-up well, don't they?

Under the "controlled" side of fire & anger we can say that when we become angry about those things that make God angry, we are displaying a very constructive righteous anger. When our anger wells up over modern day slavery; injustice and hunger, know that God would have us fan the flames of that fire, and let our righteous anger yield the kind of discomfort necessary to initiate godly change.

While the Kingdom of God advances in this world through selfless acts of love and mercy, it will also be fueled by the righteous anger of the Children of God who want to see peace, justice and healing on this earth.

For some of us this is a difficult but necessary calling. Know that God can use our anger, as long as it is controlled and in line with His will.

But for the majority of us, the bigger issue is not so much fanning the flames of righteous anger, but controlling unrighteous anger; anger that destroys relationships and opposes God's will.

And so the Bible tell us:

Ephesians 4:26-27

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.

Last week we used the story of Cain's resentment against his brother Abel; when God looked with favor upon Abel's exceptional offering but looked with distain upon Cain's mediocre gift. And though forewarned by God, Cain allowed his resentment to grow into an uncontrolled anger against his brother that lead to murder. Interestingly, if that anger had been controlled, it could have transformed Cain's behavior; so that the next time he would offer his best to God and experience God's favor!

We need to take scripture seriously:

Ephesians 4:26-27

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.

Interestingly, the words in Ephesians reflect what was heard thousands of years before in Genesis regarding the influence we give to the Devil whenever we fail to control the anger that is a natural part of living life. That Greek word used to describe the "foothold" we give to the devil is *topos*, which literally means: "opportunity" or "location". So, if we fail to daily deal with our anger in a Godly way, it's almost as if we give the Devil a seat

next to us on the couch, and allow him to whisper thoughts into our ears. And sadly, it doesn't take much anger to get us going in a direction away from God.

We heard that expressed by Jesus in:

Matthew 5:21-22

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Scholars say that "Raca" is a derogatory term like "idiot" or "jerk", and while we might not classify that as "angry enough" to be worried about, Jesus knows how easy it is for people to set a course away from God; away from his love, mercy and blessings; in short, to set a course on a road to hell.

God has done everything to draw us closer to Him, short of taking our free will away from us. He came to Abraham to establish a covenantal relationship. He came to us in flesh through Jesus Christ. His laws point us in the direction of right-living, warning us away from destructive options. His grace gave people numerous opportunities to "try again", to "reboot", and to "restart" when they forgot about God. God's love ultimately expressed in Jesus' death offers us both the Way and the motivation to walk that Way of salvation.

But here in Matthew 5 Jesus points out that sometimes it is in the little things that we set our direction. And so it is best to deal with and gain

control over our unrighteous anger by dealing with it daily, and then letting it go. Jesus' brother, James gives us good basic advice on how to do just that:

James 1:19-20

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Don't let human anger harm your relationships with one another, or with God. **When you feel anger rising up:**

- 1. Quickly become a good listener,**
- 2. Be slow to respond;** allow God's Word to transform your thoughts , words and deeds, and
- 3. Let anger be slow to rise up.**

And what I mean by that last point is that human anger tends to be impulsive and volatile. Can you relate?

Proverbs 14:17a

17 A quick-tempered person does foolish things,...

Proverbs 29:11

*11 Fools give full vent to their rage,
but the wise bring calm in the end.*

If anger needs expression, we want to make sure it is a righteous anger that will ultimately draw us and others toward God, and not away from one another.

2. Fear/Worry

Let me offer just a few quick thoughts on fear.

From our earliest memories we all discovered our capacity to fear. My study of science taught me about the “flight or flight” response God gave us to deal with real dangers; our hackles that rise on our skin and the adrenaline that surges into our body; all a part of God’s construction of us.

But while God gave us this ability, He doesn’t want fear to destroy us. During FDR’s first inaugural address; words to a nation facing the depth of the Great Depression, he proclaimed that “The only thing to fear, is fear itself.” FDR saw the potential destructive force of fear, but he also believed that America could rise up from poverty to be strong again if the nation-gripping fear could be overcome. And he was right back then.

Today, we are a people again paralyzed by fear. In fact, fear is used regularly by terrorists as well as politicians & companies selling their products; people in power and people seeking power to motivate us to their way of thinking.

This is not why God allows us to fear.

Today more than even we need to hear God’s Words about fear.

2 Timothy 1:7 ESV

... God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

And we can experience that if we do two basic things:

- 1. When our natural fears cause us to worry,
make a plan to deal with what you can deal with, and then**
- 2. Turn your remaining fear & worry over to God.**

My mother was a very smart & wise woman, though I never saw that growing up! She used to always say, “Don’t waste a good worry”, meaning that we worry about too many things at too great a cost to our minds and bodies. If worrying leads you to constructive actions, then thank God for bringing to mind those necessary changes in your life.

But don’t worry about things you have no control over; “*Don’t waste a good worry*”! Give that fear & worry to God.

Why would we do that? Because God is greater than whatever is causing our fears and worries.

Face your fears as King David did:

Psalm 56:1-4

- 1 Be merciful to me, my God,
for my enemies are in hot pursuit;
all day long they press their attack.*
- 2 My adversaries pursue me all day long;
in their pride many are attacking me.*
- 3 When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.*
- 4 In God, whose word I praise—
in God I trust and am not afraid.*

We need to recognize the painful truth that when we continue to fear and worry about those things beyond our control, we are revealing a lack of faith in God; the God who has revealed Himself to be almighty, all-powerful, loving and faithful to all His promises.

But the good news is that fear gives us opportunity to push us closer to God by growing our trust and faith in Him.

Fear invaded the lives of Chad & Melissa Barrett on August 23, 2010 when a doctor told them that Kristina, their 8-year old daughter, had the

rare Clear Cell Sarcoma. Today she is the longest living survivor with this metastatic cancer.

In their book, *When She Sings, God Dances*, Chad & Melissa write about how they are learning how to overcome their fear of losing our daughter to cancer.

The thing about fear, they write, is that it cripples you... you can't move... something is restricting you – leaving you unable to function.

Facing words like:

"Challenging case.", "Six weeks of radiation.", "Radical surgery.", "May not survive." drove them to God's side. They desperately wanted to be in His secret place.

They grew in their understanding of His many biblical names:

El Elyon – Most High – it means strength and sovereignty.

El Shaddai– Almighty – overpowering on the mountain;

adequate for every situation.

YHWH – Lord – is God's personal name meaning eternal existence.

Elohim – God — supreme being.

God's names found application in their fear-threatened life. They said:
...they are so real ...now and becoming more real each time I meditate on them. No wonder the psalmist viewed God as his refuge and fortress, seeing that he could trust in Him, so can I. I trust in You, Lord.
... I don't know what will happen in the future with Kristina. But He tells me things that are guaranteed.

- *He is with us.*
- *His power is here, and it is perfect.*
- *We are under the cover of His feathers.* (imagery from Psalm 91:4)

Finally, they wrote:

We're so close we can feel His heart beating. There's security here. Our goose bumps disappear. So does our fear. We are seeking to replace the words of the doctors with the words of El Shaddai.

No matter what happens, we will all be OK because our God is bigger.

SOURCE: A SHIELD FROM FEAR BY CHAD BARRETT <http://morfmagazine.com/article/shield-fear>

Friends, there is no question that we live in a world that generates fear, but having faith in God; trusting in the One who is “bigger” is the antidote to the toxic effects of fear.

While we tend to fear those who hold power over us, the God who rules over all, also gave His all, his only begotten son so that we might be saved. And when we take ownership of God’s mercy, love and gracious salvation, we will say “Amen”/”Yes, yes” to the words of the Apostle John:

1 John 4:18a

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.....

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