

TUESDAY 03 May 2022 "Anger?" (Matt. 5:21,22)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

We're spending a few days with the disciple Matthew in the weeks following the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. *Matthew, like all the close friends of Jesus, is trying to make sense of it all.* Jesus had told His disciples that He was sending them out to teach other people what they had learned from Jesus. So, Matthew was reflecting on a very significant day when Jesus spoke shocking words to the people which we today call His "Sermon on the Mount". Matthew records it for us in detail in Matthew 5, 6, & 7.

Today, let's consider these words Jesus spoke that day: **"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment."** (Matt. 5:21) *With simple but powerful words Jesus was introducing a radical lifestyle... a God honoring lifestyle!* Jesus knew most of those listening to Him that day were Jews, and they knew God's 10 Commandments, which had been given to their ancestors and Moses about 1500 years before. One of those Commandments is **"You shall not murder"**. (Exodus 20:13) While spoken by God to the Hebrews who had escaped slavery in Egypt, by the time Jesus spoke the words, this was an accepted fundamental life principle, in every society. *Everyone knew murder was wrong, no matter where you lived in the world.*

But did you notice the masterful way Jesus introduced His radical call to living far above the minimum base level of survival? *Jesus called the people to look deep into their own hearts, to the emotions behind murder and specifically the emotion of ANGER!* Oh, you and I know there are other very powerful emotions that can move people to do very wrong things including murder. Emotions like pride and arrogance, or hatred and lust, or jealousy and resentment. But Jesus is here calling out one particular emotion, **ANGER**, *that if left uncontrolled can ruin a reputation, destroy a relationship and actually lead a person to wound or even kill another person.* As Matthew reflected on these words Jesus had spoken, they took on new meaning when he remembered what he had seen in the anger of the mob calling for Jesus' crucifixion, or the anger of the religious leaders bringing Jesus to Pilate and demanding His execution!

One of those Pharisees who was so angry about Jesus that he nearly lost his mind was a man from Tarsus named Saul Paulus. While not mentioned by name that Easter weekend, I'm confident he was not only there, but he may have been one of the loudest voices calling for Jesus' death. *His anger was rooted in his conviction that Jesus was a fraud, a liar. Saul Paulus absolutely rejected any notion of the incarnation.* It was impossible, in his well-educated mind, that God would come to earth, take on human flesh and live among us. Saul was also livid about the notion that this man Jesus could possibly be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. In his anger Saul was determined to harass and persecute ANY and all followers of this Jesus to the full extent of the laws... both the religious laws of the Pharisees and the laws of Roman society.

It became Saul's life mission to exterminate this "Jesus movement" and remove from history any mention of the name Jesus!

As you may know, 'angry Saul' is finally identified by name in Acts 8:1 as the Pharisee giving oversight to the stoning execution of Stephen, one of the leaders among the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, in the months following Jesus' resurrection and ascension back to heaven. But Saul's anger was so deeply rooted in his life, Saul was not satisfied with persecution of Jesus followers only in Jerusalem, so he traveled to other cities, including Damascus, Syria. On his way there, Acts 9 records for us the life changing encounter "angry Saul" had with "resurrected Jesus". *The power of that encounter and the subsequent three days Saul spent praying, asking for God's understanding, totally changed Saul's angry life and he became the prominent, most passionate proclaimer of the truth about Jesus, the Son of God!* You may know Saul even took on the name Paul and became known as the Apostle Paul, the author of 13 books in the New Testament!! Now that, my friends, is a radical turnaround of a man whose life was dominated by anger! Look around your circle of friends... do you see anyone whose life is profoundly impacted by anger?

In fact, listen to what Paul wrote to the people that he had drawn to trust in Jesus to be their Savior, in the great city of Ephesus. That letter is known in our Bible as Ephesians, and Paul writes: ***"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... And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger...Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*** (Ephesians 4:26-31) Now let me ask you my friends, do you hear Paul and Jesus both saying, 'don't ever get angry'? NO! In fact, the Bible tells us God Himself gets angry! Did you know that?

One of many examples I see in God's Word is when Moses was up on Mount Sinai with God for 40 days receiving from God the instructions about the wonderful, holy relationship God wanted with His people, whom He loved and who He had rescued out of Egyptian slavery. Exodus 32:9,10 says: ***"The LORD said to Moses: 'I have seen these people and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave Me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.'"*** Wow! What do you think would make God say such a thing about a group of human beings He had told repeatedly that He loved? How about rejection and idolatry? Exodus 32 is that terrible story of the Hebrew people, at Mount Sinai, asking Aaron to make them idols of gold and declaring these idols to be their gods, and then worshiping the idols. And if that wasn't enough, then asking Aaron to lead them back to Egypt and to slavery, rather than living as a free people under God's care!

Anger is a God given emotion in response to things which are terribly wrong. Anger can motivate someone to great courage in the face of terrible evil.

But the message of Jesus in Matthew 5:21,22 and the teaching of Paul in Ephesians 4 is that anger can also easily get out of control, and when it does, it provides an entry point of Satan's evil influence, into the heart and mind of the angry person. Paul knew it all too well... he had lived it for way too long! *But Paul had rationalized his anger by thinking he was actually doing the right thing by opposing the followers of Jesus...* until his encounter with the risen Jesus gave Paul clarity on the truth he needed to fully understand the wrong his anger was leading him to do!

Did you see that Paul wrote an action plan for dealing with ANGER, my friends?

First, be wise enough to know where the boundary line is in your anger, beyond which is sin, and don't go there! Do you, my friends?

Second, Paul challenges us to be sure anger is resolved before sundown. What do you think he means? I have found anger can fester over time and festering anger distorts the reality of whatever you are angry about. Such prolonged anger can easily lead to resentment and bitterness and then even development of strategies for vengeance!

Do you notice Paul also warns that *unresolved anger can both grieve the Holy Spirit* who lives within and should be guiding all thoughts and actions of a true follower of Jesus, *as well as giving the devil an entry point into the life of the angry person?* Now both of these are really dangerous and dreadful possibilities my friends which we must counter at all times. Finally, do you see Paul says to "**Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger.**" *That's a very specific and aggressive action plan of protecting yourself from the rapidly growing emotional and spiritual cancer each of these words represent: bitterness, rage and anger!* But in addition to removing these emotions from your life, Paul gives a very specific proactive action plan: "**Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**"

So, my 'Walking with Jesus' friends, it's time for a defining moment decision. *What will you and I do with the words of Jesus and Paul challenging us to deal with a very real, prominent and profoundly dangerous emotion which is destroying marriages, families, communities, businesses, schools and even nations in our world today... ANGER?* I urge us all to take a close look... does anger have any part in your life? What does Jesus ask us to see in ourselves today and what is Jesus ready to help us do about it? No song today, just honest and deep personal reflection. *What about ANGER in your life my friends?*

Today's Scripture is Matthew 5:21, 22.