

Anger

Proverbs 14:29-30; 15:1, 18; 16:32; 19:11, 19; 24:28-29; 25:21-22

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is good to be with you. If you are a guest or a visitor, welcome. If this is your first Sunday here, or you've been coming for a couple weeks and we haven't had the opportunity to meet, I would love to meet you, love to welcome you, because we are glad that you're joining us this morning. This morning, we're continuing in our summer series, looking at the book of Proverbs. We're going to start our reading this morning in Proverbs 14, so if you would like to follow along in your Bibles, that's where we'll start. We'll also project the passage on the screen, and because we're going to be jumping around some, it may be easier to follow on the screen, because we are jumping around a little bit in the book of Proverbs, right? It's not like the other books of the Bible that oftentimes have kind of a logical sequencing of verses within a chapter, or they're dealing with a similar topic or theme within the same chapter. Proverbs kind of is all over the place a little bit, right? You could be reading two verses about family, and then the next two verses are about anger, and then you're reading verses about wealth, and then about vocation, and all these sorts of things. So, instead of going chapter by chapter, verse by verse, we're looking at various themes from the book of Proverbs this summer.

We've dealt with wisdom, we've talked about friendship, we heard about envy last Sunday, and this morning, we're taking up the topic of anger. Now, a few years ago, I was talking to a friend of mine. She's very into the Enneagram, or at least she was then. Some of you maybe are familiar with the Enneagram. It's basically a personality test, and you fill out the questions, and you find out what you are, what number you are. I know very little about the Enneagram, except for what number I am. That's all I really know. But my friend knows a lot. She can tell you all about all the numbers. So, she asked me this day, "what number are you, Penny?" I said, "well, I'm a one." Now, a one is a perfectionist. That's the word that goes with it. Those of you who know the Enneagram, you're probably analyzing me right now, and you're probably right in what you're thinking. But I said, "A one," and my friend immediately, without hesitation, said to me, "so, you struggle with anger, don't you?" And I have to say, I was taken aback by that, that this is what she led with, "You're a one, so you're an angry person." I was taken aback by it, and I remember thinking, and I'm pretty sure I actually said aloud, "no, no, no, no, no, I don't struggle with anger. I get frustrated, and I get annoyed, and I get impatient. But anger? No way. I don't worry, struggle, or get angry."

But, you know, my response actually revealed something that is true of many of us. You see, I and we don't want to be angry people, or known to be angry people, or even struggle a little bit with anger. Now, we're okay with struggling a little bit with pride, with impatience, with lacking humility, but to struggle with anger feels very different, doesn't it? It kind of feels worse than those other things. It kind of feels a little gross. And yet, the truth is, I do struggle with anger. And so do a lot of you. And it's not the anger that explodes in rage, right? It's that low-grade, simmering-below-the-surface sort of anger. So, what are we to do with that? What does the Bible have to say about anger? Well, let's begin our reading:

Proverbs 14:29: "whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly."

14:30: “a tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.”

15:1: “a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

15:18: “a hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.”

16:32: “whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”

19:11: “good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.”

19:19: “a man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again.”

24: 28- 29, “be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, I will do to him as he has done to me. I will pay back the man. I will pay the man back for what he has done.”

And 25:21: “if your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. For you will heat burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.”

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word, and ask that as we come to it, that you would give us understanding, understanding of your Word, and understanding of ourselves. We pray, Lord, that you would lead us in your truth, that you would guide us, and allow all that is said and done this morning to honor you. And we pray this in the name of Christ. Amen.

So, let's take a moment and just think about the last time we got angry. I want you to think about that, okay? So, just think for a second, and I want you to think about what was the circumstances? What was it that caused the anger? What were you thinking? Why did you get angry, and what did it do to you? Okay, you got something? There's actually a lot of things we probably could get angry about, right? I mean, the Avett brothers sing, there's a lot of reasons to be mad. Let's not just pick one, right? We can be mad at all sorts of things, right? We can be angry at the death of the innocent. We can be angry at the injustice in our city, about the lives of elected officials, about the mistreatment of children, about our personal sins, and when we've been personally slighted, and the list goes on and on and on. There are so many things we can be angry about. So, the last time you got angry, was it one of those?

I imagine if you're like me, and I think most of you are, the last time we got angry was probably something much more minor, and much more inconsequential. In fact, this past week, I was having lunch with a friend, and as we were eating lunch, he asked me, “is there anything you don't like about yourself?” Now, I don't think he was trying to make it sound like I'm like this prideful person, at least I hope that's not what he was intending, but it surprised me, because no one's ever asked me that question before, but it didn't take me long to answer it, because 20 minutes before he asked that question, I was fuming in my car. I was angry, I was frustrated, I was annoyed, and why? Because the car in front of me didn't turn at

the appropriate time, that's why. And because they were slow, because they delayed me, because I wasn't able to move through the intersection at the speed at which I like to move, the rest of my drive, all I could think about were the things I wanted to say, and the things going through my mind, right? Like, this person's going to make me late, doesn't this person know I have only a certain amount of time to get to this lunch, and if this person wants a leisurely drive, go to the parkway, not Grandin Road, right? Now, I didn't say any of those things out loud, I was just thinking about them, and I was consumed by those words so much so that I have no recollection of what was on the podcast after that. Like, I had to go back and listen, because I was consumed in the moment.

1. The Ruin of Anger

a) Ruin to Our Relationships

How about you? What do you get angry about? What does it do to you? I imagine it probably consumes you as well. And that's what anger does. You see, that's what anger did to me. For a few minutes in that drive, I was consumed with anger. And it was bringing ruin. You see, that's what anger does, it ruins. It brings ruin to our relationships. We heard it in our passage, 15:1: "a harsh word stirs up anger." 15:18, "a hot-tempered man stirs up strife." You see, when we're given over to anger, we're going to lash out, we're going to be quick to use our tongue to repay the person we're angry with. I don't have to sell this very hard, because we know this. We know the damage that anger can do to our relationships, we know it because we've personally seen it. How anger has left ruined relationships in its wake. We've seen it with our friends, we've seen it in our families. But maybe we try to get around this by saying, you know, that's true, but I keep my anger inside. No one ever sees it. No one ever knows about it.

I can contain my anger. I mean, think about that car ride that I described, right? Like, I didn't roll down the windows, I didn't yell anything, I didn't make any hand motions, right? But so what harm did it do? Who was it hurting? But the truth is, is that strife in the midst of silence is strife nonetheless. Ruin comes even from internalized anger. You don't have to express anger at someone to do damage to that relationship. Now, that person was a stranger, I'll never see them again, I don't even remember what kind of car they drove, but when we foster anger against a family member, against a friend, against members in the same church, when we hold on to it, even if we never let it out, it is doing damage to the relationship.

b) Ruin to Ourselves

It is ruining the relationship without the other person even knowing that it's happening. It ruins our relationships, but it also ruins us. It ruins ourselves. Anger affects us. Doctors will tell you that anger can lead to a whole host of physical problems, heart disease, eating disorders, diabetes, headaches, high blood pressure, depression, the list goes on and on and on. It does damage to our bodies, but it also does damage to our souls. 19:19 said, "a man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again." That's informative, isn't it? That the angry man is given over to anger again and again and again. It's lacking self-control. It's sinful. We heard in 29:22, "a man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression." We could translate that last clause, a hot-tempered one commits many sins. And we know this. Anger gives birth to sin, because we're going to say things we regret, and we're going to do things that need forgiving, and we're going to act in ways that are vile, even when internalized, anger ruins.

2. The Relinquishing of (Sinful) Anger

So, what do we do with that? Well, we need to relinquish our anger. We need to relinquish our sinful anger. And I make sure to include the word sinful there, because that's what we've been talking about so far. We've been talking about sinful anger, but the truth is that there's another kind of anger. You see, we relinquish our sinful anger by embracing righteous anger, which is probably not where many of us would go in our thinking.

a) Embracing Righteous Anger

Many of us, I think, if we struggle with anger, and we're trying to let go of it, we're trying to relinquish it, we might think that we need to pursue this sort of, like, Jedi, Zen-like existence, right? Like, we're either happy, or we just kind of function in this, like, place of, like, neutrality. But that's actually not the Bible's perspective. Did you notice in the verses we read how frequently we heard the phrase slow to anger? We heard it in 14:29, 15:18, 19:11. And actually, if we were to read through all the Proverbs, we would hear it again and again, over and over. See, Proverbs is telling us that the wise person isn't the person who never gets angry. No, the wise person is the one who is slow to anger. And that indicates that there are times when anger is appropriate, that there is a righteous anger. We actually heard it in our New Testament reading, didn't we? Be angry and do not sin. Be angry and do not sin.

Now, I have to tell y'all, that sounds near impossible. And yet, that's exactly what the Bible is presenting, that there is a righteous anger. A righteous anger that God himself demonstrates. Do you remember in Exodus 34, when God reveals himself to Moses, he says of himself, a God, a God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Slow to anger, and there are things that are anger-inducing. And so, we are to embrace a righteous anger. Now, before going on, we need to be careful that the acknowledgement of righteous anger doesn't give us a pass for all of our anger. Because it'd be easy to do that, right? Like, yeah, those people struggle with sinful anger, but my anger, it is always justified, it is always righteous. It'd be very easy to give ourselves a pass.

But if we're honest with ourselves, we know that we can't give ourselves a pass, right? Because those inconveniences, those minor annoyances, those personal slides, the car at the light, right? That's not righteous anger, and we all know it. No, righteous anger is the anger that the Lord expresses, that Jesus expressed. Anger against sin, anger against injustice, anger against death itself. I mean, think about in the Gospels, like in John 11, with the death of Lazarus, Jesus comes into the town, and he weeps with those who are weeping, right? He mourns with those who are mourning the death of their friend and their brother, but we're also told that Jesus had indignation. In fact, the word that's used there, it's a Greek word, and it's describing, it's used for horses, war horses, and how they would snuff, they would snort going into battle. It's indignation, it's anger at death itself. That's what Jesus felt. Or in Mark chapter 10, when the children are being prevented from coming into the presence of Jesus, we're told that Jesus had indignation at those trying to prevent the children from coming, and so we see Jesus himself expressing righteous anger against injustice, against abuse, against evil and death. And so one way we relinquish sinful anger is by embracing righteous anger.

b) Extending Grace

It's appropriate to be angry at injustice. It's appropriate to be angry at abuse. It's right to be angry at death. But we also relinquish sinful anger by extending grace. Now, grace, we often

define as unmerited favor, and that's a fine definition, but biblical grace is even more than that. It's not less than that, but it's more than that. Biblical grace, many of you have heard me say before, is demerited favor. It is favor to the person who has actually earned the opposite of favor, who has earned unfavor. I guess that's the word, right? If that is a word, I'm not really sure. However, that's what biblical grace is. It is getting the very opposite of what we deserve, and that's how we combat anger, by extending grace to those who don't deserve it. We heard in 15:1, "a soft answer turns away wrath." 15:18, "he who is slow to anger quiets contention". 19:11, "good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense." 24:29, "do not say, I will do to him as he has done to me. I will pay the man back for what he has done." And 25:21, "if your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink." So you hear what Proverbs is saying. The wise man, when treated poorly, when they're angry, when someone is angry with us, is going to respond not in kind, and that is foreign to us, because our natural inclination, when someone is angry with us, when they're getting hot with us, is to not respond with gentleness and kindness and forgiving. What is our natural inclination? We want to hurt them back. We want our anger to be poured out, right? But what does that do? I mean, it just creates more strife and anger, doesn't it?

I mean, think about those of you who have children at home. And even if you don't have children at home, you've seen this, right? A child didn't get what they wanted. They thought that the punishment for what they did was unfair, and so what do they do? They explode, right? I mean, not my kids, but y'all's kids, right? This is what they do. Right? They explode. They get angry. They raise their voice, right? This is what they do. And so, as parents, how do we respond? Well, we raise our voice back, right? And they're getting hot, so we get a little bit hotter, because in getting angry with our kids, getting a little bit louder with them, getting a little bit hotter than them, it's just going to calm everything down, right? The kid's going to go, oh, I have no reason to be angry anymore, right? Like that happens. Of course it doesn't happen, right? They get angry, and we get angry, and they get angry, and we get angry, and it just keeps building, and it just keeps building, right? It's like adding wood or air to a fire. It just makes it worse. It makes it hotter and bigger. We know this. It grows and grows when we respond in kind. But a soft answer?

I remember a number of years ago, I was spending time with some friends, and we were talking about something, and I was starting to get a little bit worked up, and I was starting to fume a little bit, and as I took a breath so I could vent some more, my friend took the opportunity of my breath to interrupt me, and I remember it distinctly. He said, "Penny, look at you. What is this about?" That's all he said. A single soft word that closed the vent and doused the flame and calmed the moment. He didn't meet my anger with anger. No, instead, he was gracious. He was gracious, and in this gracious moment, he was inviting me to look below the surface to see what the anger was really about, and you see, that's what grace does.

You see, that's what the soft word does. It gives space, and it gives air for us to see what is this really about. It helps us to diffuse the anger and to see the sin beneath the sin, to ask the questions of why am I angry? What is really happening? What is the emotion or experience that I'm feeling that's coming out in this way? Those are the questions that we need to ask, because anger is never really the problem. It's simply the outward manifestation of the problem. We need to ask ourselves, why are we angry? Like, why did I get mad at that slow driver? I know exactly why I got mad at him, because I value with a great deal efficiency, and they were making me slow and inefficient, and now I was potentially going to be late for my lunch with my friend, and what would that say to my friend if I was late for our lunch? Well,

it would say that I don't value his time as much as my own, and I didn't consider him when I was driving, and I didn't think about him and think ahead enough to actually make plans to get there on time, and he's just going to think I'm a terrible person. That is what was going on in my heart, and I am not lying.

That is not embellishment. So, what about you, though? When you get mad at a personal slight, maybe it's because how people see you is of great value to you, and you want to make sure that they see you in a particular cure-rated sort of a way, and when they don't, that stirs anger, or maybe you're filled with anger when your out in public, and they act up, and maybe we're angry when this happens because it's challenging our view of what a good parent is, and we're now wondering if we're a good parent, and what others might think about our parenting. You see, when the grace of a calm word, of a soft answer comes into our life, into that moment of anger, when that grace is extended to us, or we're extending it to others, it is now giving us space and help to see what is below the surface so that we can relinquish our anger, and the fact is, friends, that we need that grace. It's not the kind of grace that we deserve, or the kind of grace that others deserve. No, we have demerited that favor, but it is the grace that our sinful anger needs. That is what we are in need of, and that is the grace that has been given to us.

Do you remember in 1 Peter 2, Peter speaks of Jesus, and he says, "he committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." Y'all think about that. Jesus on the cross, executioners, accusers, casting insults, and mocking him, and killing him. If ever there was a time in the history of the world when anger and wrath was deserved, it was at the cross, and yet what did Jesus do? "Father, forgive them." Instead of reviling and angrily condemning, Jesus was gracious, and that's what he is with us. That we who have sinned against God with our anger, and we deserve his righteous anger because of Christ, he gives us grace. And it is that grace that opens our eyes to the ruin of anger, and it is that grace that empowers us to relinquish our anger into the hands of a gracious God. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you reveal and expose our sin to us, that by your word and your spirit and your people, you show us what we need, and that is your grace. And Father, we thank you that that is not all that you show and reveal, that we are in need of your grace, but you actually give it as well. And so, we thank you that when we deserved your anger, you spoke loving words to us, that when we deserved your wrath because of our sin, you gave your Son to die in our place, that instead of receiving anger, we received grace and love. And so, we thank you for that, and we ask that you would make us a people, make us a people who relinquish our anger and pursue grace. And we pray all this in the name of Christ, and God's people said together, Amen.