



Contemptuous Anger = Murder

I. INTRO

A. This has been a tough week for me thinking, studying, and praying about anger.

1. I have struggled with anger for most of my life. Anger is an old foe.
2. I was telling a friend recently that sometimes I feel like a pinball machine with a ball of anger bouncing around my soul.
3. When I was younger I got into a fight and went into a blind rage and put another young man into the hospital...
4. So, I'm speaking to you as a fellow traveler today – not someone who has it all together.

B. Our passage for today is Matthew 5:21-26 but before we go there I'd like to provide some pastoral theological perspective to help us make better sense of what Jesus is seeking to accomplish in the SOTM...

1. As I have stated a few times Jesus is the most revolutionary person who has ever lived. Jesus came to overthrow the world system and to establish the kingdom of God on the earth (which He did) – and the SOTM is His manifesto.¹ With that in mind here is a brief outline² of where we have come so far in the SOTM:
2. “[The Sermon on the Mount] describes what human life and human community look like when [we] come under the gracious rule of God” -- John Stott³
3. Jesus called His followers to be God's called-out people in a broken world.
 - a. **In Matthew 5:3-12 Jesus addresses our character.** We are to be distinct from the character that the world system admires through the

¹ Like Marx & Lenin's *Communist Manifesto*, or the *U.S. Declaration of Independence*, or Martin Luther King Jr's *I Have A Dream Speech*)

² Click [here](#) to see the full outline on the KHC Pastor's Blog.

³ John Stott, Dale Larsen, Sandy Larsen. *A Deeper Look at the Sermon on the Mount: Living Out the Way of Jesus*, IVP Connect 2013:10.

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counter intuitive qualities identified in The Beatitudes. They are the unlikely route to joy.

- b. **In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus addresses our influence.** We are to reflect light into (spiritual) darkness and we are to be the salt that seeks to prevent (moral) decay.
- c. **In Matthew 5:17-6:18 Jesus addresses our righteousness.**
 - 1) Matthew 5:20 is the thesis, or purpose, statement of Jesus' manifesto: *"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* Can you imagine how shocking that statement must have been to His hearers? At the first hearing it seems like an insurmountable challenge – but here's what Jesus is saying:
 - 2) We are to exceed the superficial righteousness of the established religious community through responding to God from a changed heart – one that recognizes our own spiritual poverty and receives God's mercy (5:3, 6–7).
- d. **In Matthew 5:17-48 Jesus addresses the ethics of the Kingdom of God.** The rest of Mat 5 is Jesus' interpretation of the outworking of v. 20... There are six comparisons between the external performance of the law and our internal responsiveness to the gospel of the kingdom of God.
 - 1) Murder/anger: vs. 21-26
 - 2) Adultery/lust: vs. 27-30
 - 3) Divorce: vs. 31-32
 - 4) Oaths/honesty: vs. 33-37
 - 5) Retaliation/non-retaliation: vs. 38-42
 - 6) Hatred/Love for enemies: vs. 43-48
- e. **In Matthew 6:1-18 Jesus addresses our devotion.** Expressed through...
 - 1) Giving of time, energy, and resources: vs. 1-4
 - 2) Prayer: vs. 5-15
 - 3) Fasting: vs. 16-18 (we have scheduled another all church fast for Aug 10-13)

C. With all that said, let's read Mat 5:21-26...

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.” –Matthew 5:20-26

II. BODY

- A. This passage, besides being part of the larger manifesto, is also a self-contained unit.
1. It is one of the premier relational passages in the whole Bible.
 2. It speaks about how people who are pursuing a radical righteousness are to relate to one another.
- B. I will make three points in these six verses:
1. **Jesus begins with a very traditional position regarding murder** (pretty much a universal statement).
 2. **Then having stated the tradition position on murder, Jesus takes a radically new position, which addresses the underlying root of all broken human relationships.**
 3. **Jesus gives us two positive examples of what to do to repair and restore our relationships.**
- C. Let’s look briefly at each one:
1. **The traditional statement about murder:** *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’”* --Matthew 5:21 (It was true then and it’s true today)
 - a. This statement is an exact duplicate of the 6th Commandment in Exodus 20:13.
 - b. It’s an accurate and true statement and by quoting it Jesus isn’t taking any issue with it.

2. Moving to our second point, **Jesus follows up the traditional statement with His radical, new, and superseding teaching**: *“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council;⁴ and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”* -- Matthew 5:22 (Whoa!)
- a. We need to let these words touch our souls. Jesus is being graphic to the extreme and He means to shock us. Can you imagine what His audience is thinking?? This kind of talk was unheard of and it was revolutionary.
 - b. Have you ever wished or sought ill will toward someone? Have you ever wished someone dead? If we’re honest we’d have to admit that we have had thoughts that are so foul that when the Lord encounters them He regards them as murder. We are all guilty of murder.
 - c. What Jesus is saying in v. 22 is: Those who are guilty of contemptuous anger are in danger of going to hell.
 - d. It needs to be said that the Bible is clear that not all anger is sinful...
 - 1) We see Jesus throughout the gospels expressing righteous anger toward the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. He was also angry with the moneychangers in the Temple who were exploiting the poor.
 - 2) We have Paul saying, *“Be angry and do not sin...”* --Ephesians 4:26a
 - 3) *“For an [elder], as God’s steward, must...not be arrogant or quick-tempered...”* --Titus 1:7
 - e. What is the difference between righteous anger and unrighteous (or carnal) anger?
 - 1) Jesus became indignant at sin, false righteousness, false teaching, and the effects of sin in the world; but Jesus never became angry over a personal attack.
 - 2) We tend to be just the opposite. We get angry when someone attacks us personally, but sometimes we’re slow to get angry over unrighteousness and the effects of sin.

⁴ Lit. *Sanhedrin* – a ruling body or council set up in each city in Israel.

- f. The radical righteousness that Jesus is teaching about demands that we think of righteousness, not as an exterior part of our being, but as interior – God goes to the very heart of every matter -- and it usually brings us up short.
 - g. God wants us to surrender to this teaching because Jesus was the only one whose righteousness surpassed the Scribes and Pharisees, who fulfilled ALL of the Law. Because Jesus did, He can give it to us.
 - h. Surrender is not passivity or resignation; it is inviting God to do IN us and THROUGH us what we cannot do on our own. Have you surrendered? Because murderers are welcome in the family of God.
3. This brings us to our final point: **Jesus gives us two positive examples of what to do to repair and restore our relationships.**
- a. First, if we suspect that a brother or sister might have something against us it is worth a conversation. And notice that from God's perspective this takes precedence over participation in worship. (The TT has been talking about putting together a Relational Reconciliation Task Force to work with those here at KHC who are still experiencing strained relationships.)
 - b. Secondly, notice v. 25: "*Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court...*" What this means is deal with offences quickly. Otherwise you could end up in prison...

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Some kind of prison seems to be a very real alternative if we are not able to achieve reconciliation.
- 1. It may be the prison of resentment, or bitterness (which the Bible says will eventually defile many). It may be the prison of fear, or sadness, or guilt, or shame, or envy, or depression. These are all very real prisons that we can end up confined to.
 - 2. Yet God invites us to see and acknowledge the dark parts of our heart and to face our contemptuous anger, whether it is directed at others or directed at ourselves.
 - 3. Remember, our anger is always a condemnation of God.

- B. And what is God's response? We expect Him to scold and condemn us, or worse, to attack and abandon us. But the wonder of the gospel is that He turns His wrath, not against you, but against His own Son.
- C. Our contemptuous anger is not condoned or overlooked; it is a rebellion that Jesus paid for rather than allowing us to face the just wrath of God.