

I should make you guys remain standing just so we can get a little, get a little dance going on next week. Shona, let me remind me. We'll keep them up just so the music can play and they can dance. I'm now going to roll it back again and make you demonstrate that you know how to do this. We'll just keep right on going.

How is everyone this morning? I feel like summer came and now it's cold again. It was a great summer while it lasted. I had two days where I wore a short sleeve shirt and worked out in the yard. It was one.

Wonderful. Now it's chilly again. Anyway, God is faithful, even in cold and warm weather. We're in the middle of a series called default settings. We introduced that a couple of weeks ago.

When we were talking about it, though that Sunday. We didn't even mention it. It was just in passing. We're going to be talking about this issue. I had three, count them, one, two, three conversations in the foyer afterwards about this idea of anger.

And interestingly enough, all of them came down to something that we call righteous anger. You know what I mean when I'm talking about that? It is when something has happened to ourselves or someone we love that it's not just sort of a minor annoyance. Alan talked about how to deal with difficult people last week, and remember he said, we don't have anything to prove when we're dealing with people, but we do have an example to set. It's not just difficult people people.

And it's not just those ideas or beliefs that we find offensive, like we talked about even the week prior. This is something that has happened to us or a family member, someone we love, that has left them with physical, spiritual or emotional, like damage. Like really stuff, bad stuff. It's not minor damage. It's damage that points to a violation of all of God's moral laws and expectations for us.

And it violates even the very basic rules of even secular governments and thinking. It's just like on every level, wrong stuff.

We're supposed to love and protect each other. And in some instances, that did not happen. And when we see it, we get angry, don't we? We are rightfully angry. We call ourselves righteously angry.

Angry. And in all of those instances, the conversations I had, it came back to this. What are we supposed to do with this kind of anger? Because as David said in psalm 139, verse 21, shouldn't I hate those who hate you? Shouldn't I despise those who oppose you?

Child abuse, sexual sin, addictions. That will kill you.

Dysfunctional social systems that are just messing up people's lives and messing with their heads and their hearts. And we just see the destruction that this kind of stuff wreaks on our families and on our kids. And if we're angry with the people and the systems responsible for that kind of harm, well, why shouldn't we be?

Shouldn't we be angry at what angers God? So today we're going to look at this kind of idea of righteous anger and find a way to express it in a way that honors God. So I'm going to pray. If you guys want to, you can turn to a book in the Old Testament called Nehemiah. Nehemiah is found.

If you go to the psalms, which is sort of right in the middle of your Bible, you open up in the middle and then journey a little bit to the left, you'll run across Nehemiah. Within a few books. You have to go through psalms, job back through Esther. If you get to Ezra or chronicles or judges, you've gone too far. So it's right there, Nehemiah.

And we're going to sort of be in Nehemiah for a little bit, talking about his story. I'm going to pray, then we'll get started. Heavenly Father, we thank you for. We're thankful for the ways in which you have placed your moral compass in us. It is right, it is appropriate that what angers you would also cause us to be disconcerted to be angry.

But we want to do that in a way that honors you. So as we open your word, we pray that you would open our eyes to see, open our ears to hear you, open our minds to understand your word to us, open our hearts to love you, and move our hands and our feet to obey you in whatever direction you send us. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. We all get angry.

99% of the stuff that we get angry about is really about us. We get hurt by our unmet needs. We get frustrated by expectations that are unmet. We get insecure. I talked about that a couple weeks ago.

When you're driving down the road and one of the kids in the backseat decides to criticize your driving ability, and all of a sudden you find yourselves unreasonably mad about your attack on your competence. When you've been driving a lot longer than they have. Those are sort of angry moments. And mostly we apologize for those, and we make it right and we move forward. But 1% of our anger might potentially be what's called righteous anger and righteous anger is simply our response to witnessing something that God has said no to injustice, abuse.

We've all got examples in our families that we could point to and say, that was wrong. And it makes me angry. So to set us sort of on this path of conversation about this, I'd like to look at Nehemiah. So if you know the story of Nehemiah, many of you don't, and that's all right, I'll give you a little background on Nehemiah. Nehemiah was one of the captives that was one of the Jewish captives that ended up in Babylon.

He served well there, and he rose to a position of prominence and trust that at some point in time, he gets a heartbeat for his home country, that he was removed from Israel, specifically Jerusalem, sort of the center point of that national identity. And he goes to the king and says, king, can we go back and repair this? And the king says, yes, I'll give you money and people and resources to go back to your home country and rebuild this capital city of Jerusalem. An amazing thing. It's a beautiful story.

Nehemiah goes back and he rebuilds the walls. He rebuilds the infrastructure that's been destroyed over the course of many invasions and battles. And in so doing, he rebuilds sort of this community identity. It's a beautiful story, like I said. But in the course of rebuilding this, Nehemiah is made aware of a very grave injustice.

Some of the wealthier members of this community are exploiting the poorer members of the community. They're loaning them money at very high interest to pay for food to feed their families. And those who can't pay end up having to sell their own children into slavery to their brothers and sisters, Jewish brothers and sisters. And so Nehemiah hears this and, well, let's just read it. Nehemiah, chapter five.

If you're there, you can read along with us in your bibles. I've got the sort of the new King James version here, so the wording may be a little unfamiliar. So you might want to use a more familiar version. Nehemiah, chapter five. It says this.

There was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren. For there were those who said, we, our sons and our daughters are many. Therefore, let us get grain that we may eat and live. Our families are large and food is expensive. Can someone help us?

There were also some who said, we've mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses just so we can afford to buy grain because of the famine. There's difficulties in the land that go beyond just the struggles of rebuilding a community. But, he says, we put everything we have up for collateral, and we still have no money. We're running out of money for food. Verse four says, there were also those who said we borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards.

Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children. And indeed, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves. Some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It's not in our power to redeem them, because we other men have our lands and our vineyards. Taxes, they say, have drained us to the point where we have to put our own children on the auction block.

And because all our assets are held by others, we have nothing to sell to get them back. It's not foreigners who are enslaving our children. It's our own neighbors who are taking our children from us, who are taking advantage of our need to enrich themselves, people in

positions of authority who are abusing that position. It's unjust, it's wrong, and it makes God angry. Maybe it makes you angry.

It certainly made Nehemiah angry. Here's what he says in verse six. And I became very angry when I heard their outcry in these words. And after serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers. Now, there's a lot here in these two verses.

It says, after serious thought, what didn't he do? He didn't rush to his Facebook page and start posting all kinds of posts about how horrible people are and what they're doing and how they're destroying civilization. He didn't do that. He didn't go out badmouthing anyone. He did what James tells us to do.

And we looked at that a couple of weeks ago. James 1:19-20 says, everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to become angry. Because why? If you have your Bible open to this verse, underline this right here. Because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Let's just say that last line, human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. So Nehemiah knew that rushing in would not be righteous anger. It certainly would not be productive anger. Instead, he ponders the issue. And then he calls a meeting.

And he calls the meeting to address the issue. Notice that he says, I called a great assembly against them. And I said to them, according to our ability, as much as has been in our power, we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who are slaves in other countries. Now, indeed look, will you sell and buy your brothers and sisters right here in your own community? Should they be sold to us?

He says, we've done our best to bring those who are far away back home. But look, a grave injustice is happening right now at our own hands.

They had nothing to say. They were silenced and found nothing to say. And then I said, what you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? He says, we're a witness to a very skeptical world, and they're salivating, just waiting for us to make a mistake somehow.

And notice this. In verse ten, it says, I also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. He goes, I'm not saying that I'm not part of the problem. He says, I'm part of the problem, too. But verse eleven, we've got to stop this usury.

Usury is this word for charging excessive interest or interest at all on loans that you give people. He says, here's what we need to do. Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses. Also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil that you have charged them. So something amazing happens.

Verse twelve says, they said, okay, we'll do it. We will restore it, and we'll require nothing from them. We will do as you say. Now, this is an amazing story, almost unbelievable, because how often does a simple conversation about injustice cause an entire group of people to repent and return to righteousness? Not very often.

And I think it may lie in the fact that we approach righteous anger from a human perspective instead of a God perspective, because there is a difference. Remember, in Isaiah 55, God says, my thoughts are not your thoughts, and my ways are not your ways. Other places says, my ways are higher. My thoughts are higher. They are not the same thing.

Your anger is not like my anger, and God's anger is not like our anger. Remember, James says, our anger and the human actions that usually follow it don't result in good things. It doesn't lead to righteousness. Human anger is just not equipped to do that, is it? Human anger cannot do what only God can do.

So what do we do when we see injustice and abuse and disregard for the weak and oppressed? Because, again, we've all seen it, and maybe we've all experienced it firsthand. The first thing I think that is helpful for me is to think about mission. And this would be what I would say is our attitude when we see injustice, when we see abuse, when we see things that are not as they should be, where people are being hurt emotionally, physically, and spiritual, spiritually, then what do we do? We move into.

Instead of rage, we move in the direction a friend of mine says, we move in the direction of love. Nehemiah's righteous anger, anger for the right reasons, moved him to use his position to serve others. He, because he was obedient and did what needed to be done, served the people who were oppressed. But notice he also served those leaders and brought their attention, brought their focus. He bettered them.

In calling them to account, he said, we must do better. Isaiah says it this way, learn to do right, to seek justice, to defend the oppressed, to take up the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow. But ephesians says this, in your anger, do not sin. When you are frustrated, when you are angry, rather than lean into mission, learn to do not sin, but good. Learn to do good.

How do you do that? Well, instead of nursing it, you got to take some positive action. Instead of nursing anger, go do something good. We rarely do that. When we're angry.

We see, we talk to others about how angry we are and what's been done and why should this have happened, and how did God allow this? All those are not discountable reactions to anger, but they don't do anything. They just sort of build. And what, I'm off script now, guys, what ends up happening is every ounce of joy and peace that we are commanded by God to live in gets eaten up by that.

In our anger, we. We rarely do good. In his anger, Cain killed his brother. In his anger, Moses threw down the stone tablets that God had written his commandments on. In his anger, Jonah, if you know Jonah's story, Jonah dared to reproach God.

In his anger. Anger and sin walk hand in hand. They are delightful traveling companions, if you like to live in bitterness. We must be very, very, very careful with anger. God told Cain, control your anger or something bad is going to happen.

You're going to do something stupid.

Yeah, he tells us the same thing. When we don't control our anger, we do something bad and we do something stupid. So rather than get angry, God says, get intentional about doing good. The nobles of Jerusalem did that. They vowed to return lands, vineyards, olive groves, houses, cash, grain, oil.

And if those guys can do good, we can do good, too. We can be better. You're angry about child abuse. Can I encourage you? Volunteer at the Agape house.

Become a casa, foster support a foster family. We've got a couple foster families in our congregation right here today. Angry about poverty. Can I encourage you to do this? Volunteer on Thursdays and Fridays down at Spin at the men's warming shelter.

Families from all over the community come there for a meal. That's a good thing to support. Support that. Angry about homelessness? Well, serve at the shelter.

Those are good things to do. Angry about people's lack of resources. We got a mobile food pantry that comes once a month. Jump in and help serve food. You angry about abortion?

Go serve with hope Resource center. Go do something good for a young mother. Embrace grace. Angry about drugs and crime? Well, do something radical.

Really radical. Robert goes every other week, at least up to Plainfield, to the men's prison up there, and serves men who have had an encounter with Jesus and now love him and meet every Sunday to worship together. You're angry about crime, you're angry about drugs, you're angry about bad stuff. Go serve in a prison.

God's anger at the destructiveness of sin caused him to do something equally radical. He gave his only son. Now, if you say, I don't know, I don't want to do any of that, then I will say that you probably don't get the right to call your anger righteous. It's just. It's just yours.

That's all it is. It's not righteous anger. Because righteous anger doesn't merely focus on the problem. It will turn and find a solution. It will turn and offer hope.

Instead of nursing anger, go do something good. And the second thing I would say is, just be angry. Maybe in a new way, be angry God's way. Remember, James says, the anger of man does not result in the righteousness of God. If that.

That verse right there is the only thing we remember from the sermon, I think this will be good. The anger of man does not result in the righteousness of God.

Because of this, I think maybe we've understood anger the wrong way. Sometimes we use words and we don't really know what they mean. I think anger sometimes is that sometimes when we use the word anger, we're getting anger wrong. At least the kind of anger that God has.

Now, we can feel really right when we're angry, can't we? We can feel pretty righteous. When in the heat of the moment, we lay into someone or into some situation really good, and we walk away and we say, man, that felt good. That felt, man, that felt good. I feel good about that.

I said what needed to be said. I made my point. I got it across. I hit a wall and I didn't hit him. I feel like that was a really good encounter right there.

We feel good. And if we're confronting, like, an evil in the world, not just an irritation, then not only did it feel good to do it, to express it, but we can almost feel morally upright because we noticed and we said something. And people now know that we stand for right. It feels good, and we feel good. God must be so proud of me for making a stand.

But bad news he is not, because the righteousness of God is never achieved by the anger of man. So maybe it's time to be angry and define that word a little bit differently. Ephesians 223 says this. We are to put off our old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of our minds, and to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. The old way of thinking and reacting and responding and understanding, that's gone.

And now we are to put on this new thing, this new garment that God has created for us, a new righteousness. I want to be holy and righteous in every attitude, even in my anger. And so here's what I can gather. True righteous anger looks like. Are you ready for this?

The first evidence or the first. The first evidence that it is righteous anger is when my heart is breaking. Not just angry, but breaking over the same sin that breaks God's heart. That's the first indicator that what I'm feeling is righteous godly anger. And then the second one is this, when I can pray for the healing of victims and the souls of the offenders with equal intensity.

That is righteous anger.

That can be hard if you're not there yet. Be very, very careful, because what you're feeling and expressing can lead you to do stupid and foolish things. Okay.

This one, I think, is important. When I can release people to God's judgment, release them to God's judgment, not mine, God's judgment. And let God judge them the way God is going to do when I can release them to God's judgment, but welcome them back at the first sign of repentance with no judgment. What, are you kidding me? No, I'm not kidding you.

This is what God does. By the way, remember, he did it to you. This is what he calls us. If we're going to have righteous anger, this is what that anger righteously looks like.

Finally, when I can channel my anger into a positive and loving action, when I so love this broken world that I'm willing to offer myself and my resources to do what God asked me to do, to show it God's love, then I am expressing in some way righteous anger. And if all those things are true, then I'm getting close to understanding how God uses the word anger.

If I am living out and managing that emotion in that kind of way, God honors that. God says, yes, that is righteous.

It's a righteous response, and it does lead to a righteous reaction. We're getting ready to take communion here. And there's always a caution when we're talking about stuff like this, because again, I know several of your stories.

Some of you are in the middle of terrible and traumatic stuff, stuff that has torn your families apart, stuff that has torn you apart, stuff that has left people that you love just broken and crushed. And I am very nervous that a sermon like this may feel a little trite perhaps. If so, I'm sorry. We do what we can do with what we've got. When we or someone we love has been emotionally, physically, or spiritually hurt by someone else.

As parents, as adults, as people in community, our grizzly bear instincts tend to turn on and we will do whatever it takes to protect and defend. That's a good thing, but it's also a very dangerous thing because we can make some silly and foolish mistakes and end up making situations worse. And again, if we live there in that space, it can rob us of the very joy that we are promised. If we trust our lives and other situations to God, we have to release it eventually or else it will take from us life and joy. And it offers nothing in return, by the way.

Even the satisfaction of anger, it gets numb. You have to let go of it. But if you're in that process or if you're there where you know you need to, letting go of it can seem somehow irresponsible. And it can feel like we don't really love enough if we let go of it, especially if the people that are suffering are sitting beside us this morning and we say with David, Lord, I don't understand. Shouldn't I hate those who hate you?

Shouldn't I be opposed to those who are opposed to you?

And if that's you this morning, Jesus says this, it is mine to avenge, I will repay, and we trust him with those people in those situations. Psalm 37 offers this beautiful, almost song. I would say I would sing it if I had a melody to sing it with, but I'm just going to read it. Psalm 37 says, be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way.

Fret not yourself over the man who carries out evil devices. Instead, refrain from anger and forsake wrath. Fret not yourself. It will only lead to evil, for the evildoers will be cut off. But those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land, and in just a little while, the wicked will be no more.

Though you look everywhere for him, he will not be there but the meek. Remember what Jesus said. The meek, those who trust the Lord, will inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.

Let's pray Jesus this morning as we prepare to take communion, the bread and the cup remind me of the peace that you offer to those who place their trust in their lives, in your care, who meekly surrender control to you.

Those of us in this room who have embraced the grace you offer through Jesus and a sacrifice of love have been reconciled back to you. We were your enemies. We were estranged from you. We were objects of wrath, the scripture says. But you, in your kindness and mercy and grace, have taken us in as your sons and daughters.

We've been brought into your family.

It was your love that accomplished this. So this morning, as we take the bread and the cup, we ask you to search our hearts. Reveal those places where we have contributed to brokenness and pain. Bring us to repentance so that we can walk in a new way. Forgive us.

Show us where we can make that right. And Lord, if there are those here this morning who are still dealing with the weight and the pain of harm and abuse, God, I pray that you would begin to restore joy and life to them.

Lord, help us all turn resentment and anger and bitterness into good, just as you did through Jesus. Free us up to experience the peace and joy that you promised to those who put their trust in you. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

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