

Series: From Israel to Everyone: Disciples who Demonstrate God's Presence (a study of Matthew).

Sermon Text: 5:21-26 Anger

(See App for lesson, slides, and to ask questions)

Good morning! Go ahead and open your Bible to Matthew 5:21–26. Back in my early 20s, I was a volunteer in The Newtown Fire Department. Now before you get to thinking too much, here me out. Back then you really only had to answer “yes” to two questions. The 1st one was, “*Would you run into a burning building?*” Now, you did hear me say I was in my early twenties? Right, ok! The 2nd question was, “*Would you be able to get a cat out of a tree?*” Now that almost got me, until I realized they never said how (laughing). Needless to say, I was hired on the spot. Seriously though, being a volunteer you had to attend monthly training. And one would think that we were done when the fire was out, but that was not the case. We had to go through that whole burn site to make sure there were no embers that could restart that fire after we were gone. Our chief would tell us, “*In a structure fire where there were still embers, it could start the fire back up.*” In one instance, they thought a house fire had been put out, and everything was good. Come to find out, in the middle of the night it started back up and burnt the rest of the house to the ground. So, we really learned about the importance of searching for embers and making sure that we doused every hot spot with water time and time again. The importance of making sure that the embers were out was grounded in us. This lesson in Matthew 5 reminded me of that story.

Anger rarely starts as a blaze; it starts as an ember we choose to keep warm. We may call it venting and even justify our frustration. But in Matthew 5, Jesus warns us that unaddressed embers of bitterness will burn down your relationships, your worship, and your soul if you don't extinguish them quickly. We may think that it's just the big sins like violence or murder that destroy lives, but Jesus says we should be concerned long before that...the subtle eye rolls, grumbling under our breath, and hidden contempt are like embers that can turn into a destructive blaze. He shows us that long before anger becomes a weapon in our hands, it has already been burning hotly in our hearts.

Remember last week when Tim highlighted that Jesus taught with authority? In the first century, rabbis built their credibility by quoting established experts. **We do the same thing today** when quoting thinkers like N.T. Wright or R.C. Sproul. But every human teacher, me included, operates on borrowed authority. **Jesus was different.** He was God in the flesh, the very Lawgiver who met Moses on Sinai. So, it was a big deal when Jesus stepped onto a mountain in Matthew 5 to directly challenge established interpretations of His Father's Laws. Jesus wasn't offering a suggestion. God in flesh was clarifying the point of the 6th commandment. And we like to cover it up by saying things like, "*Technically, I didn't break the rule*" or "*I've never killed anyone, so I'm good.*" **But listen to what Jesus said** about that in ***verse 21: You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment."***

"*You shall not murder*" is #6 in the 10 Commandments, but Jewish Rabbis added the part about "*being liable for judgment*" which suggests they were more focused on future penalties and were missing a deeper lesson. So, Jesus opened up a window into the heart of the matter by shifting focus from external legal compliance to internal Kingdom transformation - the stuff happening inside our hearts now. The last verse Tim covered in **Matthew 5:20 says**, "*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*" It's easy to read "*You shall not murder*" and think, "*As long as I don't physically kill someone and end up in court, I'm righteous or right with God.*" But Jesus shows us how God meant **something deeper in verse 22: *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; and whoever says, "You fool!" will be liable to the hell of fire.***

English translations confuse the issue by making us think of Hell, but Jesus used the word "*Gehenna*" which referred to a smoldering garbage dump in ancient Jerusalem that was known for the place of human sacrifices to false gods, rot, and burning trash. Jesus linked this to something they all knew, a present reality in their world. This wasn't about making them fear Hell, it was about dealing with current issues in their hearts like anger, insults and name calling between siblings. Nursing

anger, harboring contempt, using gossip to assassinate someone's character. Long before these put us in danger of final judgment, they make us less human...less of what God designed us to be. They make our soul like a smoldering garbage dump that ruins us from the inside out. They make our hearts like a Rumpke dump where the stink and rot impact every relationship. When garbage sits for too long it gets smelly and juicy and becomes a breeding ground for maggots. When anger stews in our hearts, they become something like Gehenna. In other words, when we let our anger smolder, we become a little less than human and dehumanize others with foul and abusive language or much, much worse!

So, how did Jesus suggest handling our anger before it blazes out of control, stinks up everything, and ruins the goodness God created? **Check out verses 23-26:** *So, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. Come 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. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.* Jesus does not leave his hearers without concrete direction in dealing with this kind of anger. His point is that reconciliation takes precedence/priority even over worship. Let me ask it like this: “After reading what Jesus said, would it be too much to imply that reconciliation should come before lifting our voices together in songs, before our time of confession and even before coming to this holy table of communion?” I think that's exactly what Jesus was suggesting! As we continue through Matthew's story, we discover that **our natural question would be**, “How can people possibly do what he says?” This takes us back to The New Covenant promised in Ezekiel 36:26-27, *“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”*

In closing, let me share a real-life example of how harboring anger is like letting embers burn out of control in our hearts. I once worked alongside a man who made

a huge moral failure: he had an affair with a co-worker, resulting in a child. The backlash in our company was immediate and severe. Outraged on behalf of the victim, colleagues isolated and shunned him. He was passed over for advancement, and eventually, I was promoted into management above him. He left the company, but years later, he returned. The man who came back wasn't just angry; he was consumed by bitterness. You see, he was starting over and we all had moved up in our career. His unchecked embers of jealousy and contempt had turned into outright hostility. If he detected weakness in those who worked for him, he weaponized his authority against them. The toxic culture he created became so destructive that HR forced him into mandatory anger management classes. Eventually, through a series of corporate shifts, my boss left the company, and this man was named the new manager. One of his very first acts in power was to demote me to an installer. Then three short years later, he fired me. For years, he carried a heavy debt of anger, letting it simmer until it completely ruined his character and dictated his actions. He proved Jesus' point in Matthew 5: when we refuse to settle the anger in our hearts quickly, we don't just hurt others—we become prisoners to our own bitterness. Jesus shows us that unchecked anger is heart-level murder. But what about unchecked desire? Next week, we'll see how Jesus applies this exact same surgery to the way we view and treat others sexually. I know these are hard truths and difficult actions to take, but as we say all the time...we don't ever have to take our next steps alone. We have the Holy Spirit and we have each other. Just reach out and ask for help when you're ready!

Sunday to Monday Connection: Jesus reminds us in Matthew 5 that anger can be like an ember. It may seem small, but if we keep feeding it or ignoring it, anger can eventually consume our relationships and our hearts. And Jesus calls us to something more than simply avoiding outward sin; He calls us to a Spirit-transformed heart that pursues reconciliation.

- **Question:** Is there an “ember” of anger, bitterness, or resentment that God is asking you to deal with this week?
- **Next Step:** Take one step toward peace. Send the text. Start the conversation. Ask for forgiveness. Or, if the other person isn't ready, bring your hurt honestly to Christ and ask Him to begin changing your heart. We don't take that step alone. The same Jesus who calls us to reconciliation gives us His Spirit to help us walk in it.

- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to explore what all this might mean for you, please speak with someone you know here or one of our church leaders.

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- Bible Project - Gospel of the Kingdom [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Heaven and Earth [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Temple [Videos](#).
- Bible Project – Day of the Lord [Podcast episodes](#).

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Big picture:** “People often say what wonderful teaching the Sermon on the Mount is, and that if only people would obey it the world would be a better place. But if we think of Jesus simply sitting there telling people how to behave properly, we will miss what was really going on. These ‘blessings’, the ‘wonderful news’ that he’s announcing, are not saying ‘try hard to live like this.’ They are saying that people who already are like that are in good shape. They should be happy and celebrate.” (Wright, 36)
- **Layout:** Recalling the passage’s design, we will be attentive to each description, and especially to the ways in which the eight are arranged and joined. In accord with literary features noted above, we may view these subjects as two sets of four. The people portrayed in verses 3–6 know their need of God, depend on him, weep before him, long for him to establish his rule, and patiently wait for him to do so. Verses 7–10 describe persons who have received the grace of God’s rule, experienced its powers and submitted to its commands. Yet all eight beatitudes remain connected to each other: the actions of 5:7 and 9 flow from the attitudes of 5:3–6; the activists stay focused on God (5:8); persecuted believers (5:10) will evidence the qualities of 5:3–6 to an exceptional degree. (Chamblin, 313)
- **A new perspective:** The gospel offers a radical reinterpretation of life on earth, and the Beatitudes dare us to take it for a test drive. Jesus wants us to taste and see that His heavenly perspective is a better way to live and specifically that “*The life you think is easy may be empty, and the life you view as miserable may be where God does His best work.*” Or as He put it later in Matthew 16:24-26 NLT “*If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn*

from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?"

- **Righteousness:** “The ultimate source of this kind of righteousness is God himself (cf. Ps. 42:1–2; 63:1). His enablement is the only satisfaction for those who long for his standard of righteousness written in his law (119:10–11, 20, etc.). Although the teachers of the law and the Pharisees focus on attaining righteousness through studying and interpreting the law, their efforts result in self-righteousness, which will not enable them to enter the kingdom of heaven (cf. 5:20). But for those who deeply long for God’s multifaceted righteousness, they will be filled. That divine satisfaction will come in a final sense in God’s future reign, but it will be experienced in the present by those who respond to Jesus’ invitation to kingdom life and enter into a relationship with him as he fills their deepest personal hunger and thirst for righteousness (cf. 12:1–8; 26:26–29; John 4:13–15; 6:35ff.).” (Wilkins, 208)

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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