

From Anger to Patience

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 6th of February 2005. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled From Anger to Patience and is based on 1 Peter 2 verses 11-25.

It's typical of two brothers. They grew up with intense rivalry, always eager for their father's approval.

And maybe typically of families, one seemed always to get it and the other not. Adam seemed always to have his father's heart.

He was given a gift of, he gave his father rather, a gift of a dog much loved. But his brother Charles seemed never to win his father's favour.

[1 : 02] He never had the acceptance that he craved. His gift to his father of a knife was still unused when his father died.

And through their lives, these two brothers, one with the father's favour, the other without, endured an ongoing rivalry leading to an intense hatred, bitter disputes, anger brewing.

Charles hated Adam with tragic consequences. That's actually a fictional story, but it's true to life. It's called East of Eden by Steinbeck.

But East of Eden is the world in which you and I live. You see, anger goes back to almost the beginning, to the original, literal, East of the Garden of Eden, where two other brothers, from whom Steinbeck's novel takes its origin in a sense, and its plot.

One favoured in one sense, the other not, though not capriciously. The one not favoured becoming angry. Very angry. Do you remember these words from Genesis chapter 4?

[2 : 23] In the course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel, for his part, brought of the firstlings of his flock their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.

So Cain was very angry. No sooner are Adam and Eve expelled from the Garden of Eden, almost, than we find anger between their two sons, from Cain to Abel.

And despite in that chapter of Genesis 4, God's very clear warning to Cain, anger masters Cain.

The Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry?

And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door.

Its desire is for you. But you must master it. And within a couple of verses, Abel, his brother, is dead.

[3 : 34] At the hand of Cain. Cain revels, almost, in his anger. That brings about murder. From footballers on the field to road rage, from parents to children, anger is a problem.

From screaming next door neighbours to Iraqi insurgents, anger is a problem. Anger management is both a film and a lucrative business.

And so, you may have seen in Friday's age, that it's not just men who anger, apparently it's women who rage as well. So if any of you need some advice, women, come and see me afterwards, confidentially, and I'll pass over the article to you.

But even in Mitchum, in the leafy eastern suburbs, not far from here in Melbourne, there are anger counselling courses that are booked out with women who are angry. Anger typifies life east of Eden.

Anger typifies life after the fall of the first human beings in the Garden of Eden. Anger typifies sinful human beings.

[4 : 51] Anger typifies life after the fall of the first human beings. After King David killed Goliath, the giant of the Philistines in battle, about a thousand BC, the crowd sang their praises about David.

Saul has killed his thousands, they said, that is, Saul the king, but David has killed his tens of thousands. And in response, King Saul was angry.

When Jonah the prophet, reluctantly sent by God to the pagan city of Nineveh, the capital city at that time of Assyria, the Assyrian king and the people repented in sackcloth and ashes.

They were spared judgment from God as a result of what Jonah said. And Jonah's response? He became angry. And when the prodigal son, in the parable taught by Jesus in Luke 15, comes home to the embrace of his father who'd been watching for him, the older son was angry.

Right from the early days, through the scriptures, into our own times, our own neighbourhoods, our own lives, anger is a manifestation of our fallen world and our fallen lives.

[6 : 12] What makes someone angry? Is anger ever okay? It's not always easy to distinguish each of the seven deadly sins, as they're called.

There is overlap between a number of them. There's overlap, for example, between pride and anger at times. There's overlap between pride and anger and envy, another of those sins that we'll see in a week or two's time.

But each one of them is fundamentally a manifestation of fallen, sinful, human nature. Anger, you see, is the fruit of usurping God's throne as we strive to place ourselves on the throne rather than God.

And when we place ourselves on the throne instead of God, then we are bound to be frustrated and bound to be angry. We are bound to be proud, we are bound to be envious, and all the other sins flow on, intertwined and interlocked.

You see, anger is related to envy, it's related to pride, but fundamentally, it is a fruit of sin, where we put ourselves first and not God.

[7 : 29] In the end, when we put ourselves first and not God, when we try to exercise control over things that are outside our control, we build ourselves up for fundamental dissatisfaction.

And then in response, anger. You see, when we rule the world, at least in our attempts and our thinking, anger comes about because we aren't actually in control.

We can't rule and we can't control. And so when the things that we desire are unfulfilled, and especially when they're out of our control in order to bring about their fulfillment, we end up angry.

When I was about 12, I spent the Christmas holidays making one of those intricate airfix models.

You know, those plastic models that you break apart each of the pieces and then with a special airfix glue like Araldite sort of stuff, you very carefully glue each piece together and you paint each piece very carefully.

You can imagine my skill and expertise at something like that, I'm sure. But that's what I, for some reason, unbeknownst to me, quite confused in my mind when I was 12, it seems, tried to make a model of what's called the Cutty Sark.

[8 : 43] It was one of the clipper ships, the T ships, that would sail from England in the mid-19th century around the south part of Africa and up to Asia to collect tea and there were races to get back and so it had billowing sails and all the rigging and all the paraphernalia, you can imagine.

Very intricate, very beautiful ship. And well into my Christmas holidays making this ship, in my attempt to be a perfectionist, which may surprise you, I broke the main mast, trying to hold it tight to let the glue set so it wouldn't set with the mast blot-sided.

And it broke. I wonder if you can imagine how I might respond to this. You might think, oh, he's a vicar now, he must have got down on his knees and prayed about it.

I confess that I didn't. You might think that I just started again and so somehow I was able to separate it and glue it and get it right.

Wrong again. What I did was simpler and much more fun. I picked up the almost completed model of the cutty sack in my bedroom.

[9 : 56] I turned away from the desk where I was making it and I hurled it with as much force as I could against the far wall. It broke into smithereens.

I got into trouble, perhaps ironically, from my father who exerts more anger than I ever do. It was the end of the cutty sack. But occasionally, for those who've known the story and now all of you do, so this expression will just keep coming back to haunt me, on those rare occasions when I do feel some anger, friends of mine will say, cutty sack moment.

I wish I'd never given you that illustration. I suddenly realised. Paul Dudley used to say that to me from time to time. You see, we want something but we can't get it. I wanted a perfect model, the

pride of making something really good, but I didn't get it.

It was out of my control once I'd snapped the mast and I was angry. But you think of the other situations. Somebody wants a particular person as their boyfriend, girlfriend, wife, husband, partner, whatever it is and that person spurns them, rejects them and they're angry because it's out of their control and so they spill over with rage.

Or we want to get somewhere on time but out of our control is somebody who's about 150 years old driving a 35-year-old car in front of us on the freeway at about 20 kilometres an hour and we're angry because we're not going to get to where we want to be on time and it's out of our control.

[11 : 33] Or we want the car to start and if you're like me you know huge amounts about cars. They're red. That's all I know. And we're angry because it's out of our control to get the car to start and so we're frustrated.

Our desires are unfulfilled. We think we're in control. We want to be in control but our anger boils over because we're not. We want to be good at our work. We might be a perfectionist and we make mistakes and we get angry with ourselves because it's unfulfilled desire that's beyond our control. We're trying to put ourselves on the throne of the world of our life where we ought not be. We keep finding that we're actually not in control. There are too many things beyond our control even in our own life.

And so anger boils over. It's an expression of dissatisfaction which comes about because we try to be God and we don't let God be God.

We're blocked from gaining what we want. We're unable to remove the blockage whatever that is. We're impatient for the blockage to be removed. We're not prepared to wait.

[12 : 43] Satisfaction lies beyond our control. So our sinful attempt to be in control is frustrated and thwarted and we're angry. Lots of these causes such as the one at Mitchum I guess might deal with some of the root causes but they often try and patch up the symptoms.

The root cause is we're sinners and we want to put ourselves on top where we ought not and cannot really ever be. The scriptures are full of warnings about anger.

The book of Proverbs as we saw last week on the issue of pride is a helpful book to turn to for warnings against anger as well. For example in, you don't need to look these up I'll just read out a few verses to give you a sample.

In Proverbs 29 we read One given to anger stirs up strife and a hothead causes much transgression. If you go back to Proverbs 20 there we read The dread anger of a king is like the growling of a lion.

Anyone who provokes him to anger forfeits life itself. Or elsewhere in Proverbs we read Make no friends with those given to anger.

[14 : 00] Oh, is that why I'm lonely? Do not associate with hotheads. Or again in Proverbs You see anger's a big issue it keeps coming up in the book of Proverbs.

A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger. Or yet again if I read this time from Proverbs chapter 27 Wrath is cruel anger is overwhelming but who is able to stand before jealousy? And finally for now from Proverbs a fool gives full vent to anger but the wise quietly holds it back. Well there's any number of books that you can buy in a bookshop that will give you advice about anger and as we've seen from The Age on Friday any number of courses or institutions that will try and solve your problem.

Mark Twain had a simple solution for anger. Mark Twain you may know wrote Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. His simple solution for anger was this. When you're angry count to four. When you're very angry swear.

They're usually superficial treatments really. Dealing with the symptoms not the cause. The root problem is sin. Ourselves on the throne and the ensuing dissatisfaction.

[15 : 23] As we saw last week with the issue of pride so this week firstly the example of Jesus is worth paying attention to. In the reading for us tonight from 1 Peter chapter 2 Jesus' example of his arrest and trial and crucifixion is in mind.

For to this you've been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth.

When he was abused he did not return abuse. When he suffered he did not threaten but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

He was the victim of injustice on an unprecedented scale. At his arrest at his trial at his crucifixion in a sense he had every reason to be angry and probably if we were in that place we would also be or we would be instead.

But to the victimisation that he endured Jesus kept turning the other cheek and as those verses say he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly to God his heavenly father.

[16:43] That's the first thing. The example of Jesus we ought to follow as we saw last week with his example of humility in Philippians chapter 2. But also as we saw last week it is more than just following a good example.

Jesus died for our sins. He wasn't just a model for us to follow but uniquely he died for our sins including our anger.

He paid the penalty for our anger when he died on the cross amongst our other sins. And that powerful death is not just to forgive us our anger so that we say God I'm sorry for throwing my cadisac model across the room.

I'm sorry for intimidating that little old lady driving the car in front of me in my act of road rage. And then we just keep on doing it again. More than that. His powerful death is not just to forgive us our sins.

His powerful death is to set us free from the power of sin so that we might live righteous lives.

Remember what this passage went on to say that Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we free from sins might live for righteousness.

[17:58] By his wounds you have been healed. How do we appropriate that power of his death? As I argued last week and as we saw last week, the powerful word of God, the powerful spirit of God, the powerful example of Jesus.

Appropriating all of those, soaking ourselves in the scripture, praying that the scriptures will be written on our heart, praying that the power of Jesus' death will work in us so that the power of sin is broken by more powerful blood.

But also, we keep finding in the scriptures not just give up this sin, but give up this sin, replacing it with something else. Focus on the virtue to eradicate the sin.

Now, what would be the sin, or the virtue that corresponds to the sin of anger? Perhaps best, patience. That might strike us as odd, but I suggest that maybe that fits closest.

You see, some of our anger is because our world is fallen and frustrated. We see injustice and disaster, and sometimes we can get angry about that. Be patient, for a better world is coming.

[19:23] Some of our anger is directed at sin. We get angry about somebody who abuses a child. We get angry about somebody who murders someone. We get angry about someone who bashes up someone on the street. Be patient, because perfect justice is coming.

As Jesus, we were told, entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. That's patience. Some of our anger is because we're dissatisfied.

We want something, we can't get it. We get angry because we can't get it. It's a sinful desire, but it spills over and makes us angry. Be patient, because perfect satisfaction is coming for us at God's hand in heaven.

God's hand. Some of our anger is because we're perfectionists. We can't cope with the fact that we fail. Be patient, because one day we will be perfect, and not before that final day.

Patience is a fruit of God's spirit. Pray that the powerful spirit, writing the powerful word of God on our hearts, or give us the fruit of patience in place of anger.

[20:46] As we wait for a world that is perfect, with God on the throne, not us, perfectly satisfied in him, perfect justice done, perfect in God's presence.

There is some wisdom then in Mark Twain. Count to four. We might need to count to a lot more than four if we're going to be really biblically patient. But the scriptures actually do urge us along that sort of path.

Solomon, who wrote most of the book of Proverbs, also wrote a sort of slightly countering book, the book of Ecclesiastes. There we read, Do not be quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.

Similarly, in the New Testament, in the letter of James, he writes, You must understand this, my beloved. Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger, for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

And that quality of slowness is a mark of patience, and the quality of slowness mirrors the example of God and his anger.

[22 : 06] God is slow to anger, the scriptures keep telling us. One of the most repeated verses in the Old Testament comes from the book of Exodus, where God, we're told, is slow to anger and full of mercy, repeated in later prophets and elsewhere in the Old Testament as well.

You see, God is patient with sin and sinners. He is slow to anger. He's not a hothead or a fool. He doesn't hurl his cutty sacks across the room with split second decision.

But slow to anger, patient. But patience means that it will run out. If patience never expires, it's not patience, it's indifference.

God is not indifferent, but he is patient with sin. But there is coming a time when he will judge it. In this world, periodically, God does judge particular sin.

We see excerpts of that in the Old Testament time and again. And then the anger of God is fiery and strong. But it is always slow. Slow, but not weak.

[23 : 19] Full anger vented against the sins of God's people and the sins of this world. We see it in the destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of some kings.

The destruction of Israel in the wilderness at different times as well. Slow to anger, but when patience expires, full of wrath against sin.

And don't think, by the way, that Jesus was never angry either. That's a myth. His overturning of the tables in the temple precincts may well have been an indication of anger and we're told that he was very angry when people objected to him healing the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day in Mark's Gospel, chapter 3.

There is then, you see, a place for right anger. It's not true that all anger is sin. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, made it clear, be angry but do no sin.

Do not let the sun go down on your anger. And James, as we've heard, be slow to anger, is indicating that there is a place for anger. Not all anger is totally sin. And we find in other places the same sort of idea.

[24 : 30] In 1 Corinthians 13, love is not easily angered, but it may be angered. There may be anger. That is right anger. There is indeed righteous anger, but there's far too much unrighteous anger, which is sin.

Indeed, we could say that to a degree, anger is actually given to us in our human nature by God as part of the image of God.

Rightly channeled, we ought to be furious with anger against sin and injustice and anything that opposes God's rule on his throne. But in our distorted and sinful human nature, we channel a good gift of God for evil purposes.

when we place ourself on the throne and not God. See, in a sense, we can say that anger responds to a challenge to the throne.

If God is on our throne, then anger will be against whatever challenges God's rule, and that's righteous anger, against sin, injustice and evil.

[25 : 40] If we are on the throne, anger will be challenged against whatever seeks to unseat us from the throne. That is, the things that are beyond our control. That's unrighteous anger.

Righteous anger has as its goal the honour and glory of God. The honour of God on the throne. And it is against his enemies and opponents, whatever seeks to unseat him from the throne.

So righteous anger is positively aimed. It is godly in intent, and it is godly in expression as well. It is full of love, so that the opponents of God, against whom anger may be vented, may indeed repent and submit to the throne of God.

But unrighteous anger has oneself as its goal. It is negatively aimed. It is selfish in intent. It lacks love. It divides people. It punishes, destroys and murders.

Righteous anger mirrors the anger of God. It upholds the values of God, and it responds to their attack or distortion in the way that God would, patiently but justly.

[26 : 54] To be righteously angry, therefore, requires a high fear of God on his throne. To the degree that God is not sovereign and king over us, our righteousness, our anger, will be compromised.

The desire to honour God enthroned more and more in our lives will mean that when we are angry, our anger is righteous, not sinful.

But to the degree that our desire is to feed ourself on the throne, then our anger is unrighteous. You see where this is heading about dealing with the cause of anger?

It is at the root of sin who's on the throne of your life, God or you. And the repeated command to be slow to anger drives us to think before we act.

Because we're sinners, our anger may so easily and readily be unrighteous, not righteous. May well be compromised in its intent.

[28 : 03] May be mixed in motives, seeking some good and some bad. Being slow to anger means stop. Assess your anger. Ponder its direction.

Are you putting yourself on the throne or God? Are you being patient for the final judgment and vindication of God? Or impatient?

Ponder. Search the motive and the object of your anger before you express it. What has been infringed that is making you angry?

Righteous anger, as I've said and as we've seen, is patient. Patient not because it's indifferent, but because it submits for the righteousness and justice of God.

Patient because it waits for God's final judgment. For God's vindication against his enemies. That patience is not just sitting back, idly twiddling thumbs either.

[29 : 08] Patience is an act of self-restraint sometimes. A holding back. A longing for fulfillment. But a submission to God's timing. You see, time and again in the Psalms, in the book of Revelation, we see those who are treated cruelly and badly by evil part of the world crying out to God, How long, O God?

Come and act, O God! But they wait for God to act. There's an eagerness of wanting God to act, but a patience in knowing that he will act and revenge is not ours.

We find several times in the Psalms, the Psalmist expressing, expressing a waiting for God. For example, in Psalm 37, we read, Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.

Do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. Refrain from anger and forsake wrath. Do not fret.

It only leads to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. There may be a real longing, a righteous longing, for the enemies of God and God's people to be brought to justice.

[30 : 32] We may cry out to God, but patiently wait for him to act. So then, we are to repent of our unrighteous anger.

We're to wage war against it, to use the expression from the reading tonight. We're to be slow to express even righteous anger. And when we do so, do it in love.

But getting to the heart of the matter, we're dealing with sin in our heart. We must keep soaking ourselves in the powerful word of God to ensure that daily God is enthroned in our heart and in our lives.

We're to relinquish our own throne for our life and submit to God's throne. We're to relinquish the desire for satisfaction in things other than that which God promises and search for our total satisfaction.

in what he will surely deliver us in Christ. We're to desire a high fear of God enthroned so that we keep remembering we are not.

[31 : 52] Cultivate the fruit of patience. Pray for that fruit from the Spirit. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.