



Red Letter City
“Anger”
Courage Church, Detroit,
MI
May 1, 2016

As many of you know we are in a series right now called “Red Letter City” and it is a series about Jesus’ sort of staple sermon, the sermon on the mount. It is 3 chapters in Matthew that are basically all written in red in most of our bibles because its basically Jesus’ interpretation of the

law, and Jesus’ take on what life should look like in this brand new kingdom that he has just established. We talked last week about how Jesus was not like other Rabbi’s. Most rabbis in that day had the authority to teach the scriptures, but only a couple of them ever even had the authority to bring a new interpretation of them, and even when they had the authority it was rarely something that was done.

But Jesus came and he said things like “you have heard it said _____ but I say _____.”

He is saying, this is my interpretation of the law. and its light, and its not more rules... but it will help you set more boundaries around your life so that you don’t end up in circumstances that you don’t know how to navigate. He is telling this whole crowd, and all of us the importance of being intentional with your life.

So yes, at first these new boundaries may seem like everything in your life just got more difficult but ultimately it is going to be life to you.

Because there are a lot of things that were going on in that day, just like today, that nobody was really talking about.

Even the law, it really only addressed transgressions. It really only addressed actions. But people were dealing with all sorts of things in their heart, things like lust... things like bitterness toward one another... because they had no idea how to process things, because they weren't even taught to process things, they may not have even understood that that was a thing. They were only taught to NOT commit crimes. Essentially the law of Moses focused on actions.

But Jesus comes in and he says "I care about the things that you are dealing with, that maybe nobody even knows about... I care so much about who you are becoming. I care what is in your heart because the heart is a window into your future."

And he begins addressing people at the core of their problems.

So let's open our bibles together, to the first case study for Jesus' approach to the iniquity in our lives, found in Matthew chapter 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.' 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. 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."

It is important to understand going into this study what is at stake here.

Your relationships. Your marriages. Your careers. Your futures. The state of your souls.

This is an issue that a lot of people deal with... and for most of us, the way we deal with it is to stuff it. The problem is that the things you stuff tend to grow roots in the grounds of your heart... Hebrew calls it a “root of bitterness,” and we will look at that in a few moments... but what happens is, if you never process your feelings, you will get so used to having them that you will begin to justify them. Because they will feel natural to you. And what Jesus is saying here is that when that happens, things can get very ugly very very quickly.

A lot of people have what I call an “Angry God syndrome.”

They have this idea in their head that God is mad at everybody all the time... and they paint this picture of a God who is upstairs waiting, rubbing his hands together in excitement, licking his lips in anticipation of the moment when he gets to finally bring judgment on our nation, and on this group of people, and on this type of person. and the bible does talk about God being angry with wickedness, and there is plenty of talk in the bible about God’s judgment...

But here is the issue.

and this is why the sermon on the mount is so incredibly crucial to our lives.

Because people believed all sorts of things about God back then...

things that were not right.

Things that were not love.

1 John 4:8 says God is love.

And people today believe all sorts of things about God that are not right.

Things that are not love.

and whatever you think that God is like, if you truly believe you are a follower of him then you are going to try and be *that*... Isn’t that what Jesus says in Luke? A disciple is not better than his teacher, but he will be like him.

So we have this nation of “Christians” who want to be like God...

but they think God is angry all the time!

and this leads to all sorts of problems. Because if God hates this type of person, then you can hate this type of person.

Because we are just trying to be like God.

So... as people who have Jesus in our lives... who are disciples of Jesus and who want to be more like the God that we serve... I think that it is incredibly important that we understand what God is like.

Does God ever get angry? Yes.

Is God living in a constant disposition of anger toward the world? No.

Jesus said “This is the year of favor of our God. The age of grace.” that's important.

In probably one of the most angry moments that we see from God in the entire bible, when Israel makes the calf out of their gold and worships it and gives the calf credit for bringing them out of the land of Egypt when really it was God who did it...

Moses goes back up on Mt. Sinai and this is how God reveals himself to Moses in this moment... it is Exodus 34... it says that the Lord descended down to where Moses was and stood with him... and then the Lord introduces himself this way...it says, THE LORD PROCLAIMED, not Moses, it isn't Moses talking... but the Lord... the Lord reveals himself this way.

“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger...”

God says, “I get angry. But I don't do it quickly.”

I am not a time bomb waiting to explode on whoever steps on my shoelace and unties my shoe... I am a God of grace that meets people right where they are and loves them into something better..

Look at what Psalm 145:8-9 says about God:

⁸ The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹ The Lord is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made.
God is slow to anger.

He loves grace. He loves it more than anything. He knows people stray from him, and it breaks his heart... but it does not boil his blood.

Did you know that when you are angry... legitimately angry in a moment, your body redirects blood and all sorts of other things and it internally begins to prepare for a fight. That is your bodies natural reaction.

and I was reading this week that when that happens, you lose on average about 30 IQ points in those moments... it is one of two times that this happens... and we will talk about the other in the next sermon.

But it is enough to make a person very hard to communicate with.

Anger naturally makes you less intelligent.

Opening you up for the possibility of some very bad decisions.

Have you ever tried to rationalize with someone who was very angry in that moment? It is nearly impossible. Its in these types of fits of rage that people often make the worst kinds of decisions.

“I am leaving.”

“I quit!”

“I hate you.”

You will say things that are not you, because *you are not all there* in those moments.

But what if you could control your anger?

Because your body is built in such a way that when you get angry you shift into this mode... you lose some clarity... but you also gain some clarity, if you let yourself see it.

See John says that God is love. (1 John 4:8)

But we also know that God is *slow* to anger. But he does get angry.

and to most of us we find this to be contradictory because we think that anger is a form of hate which stands against love.

But anger is actually love in action. It is a defense mechanism to guard what you love or to stand up for what you love.

And if God is love and God gets angry then anger must be a characteristic of love.

What is breaking God's heart so much, that he is ready to either defend or go on the offense over it? What is he ready to break, in order to save what he loves more?

those are the questions you have to ask yourself when you are wrestling with why we get angry.

God is angry when there is injustice and it causes him to, as the bible says to defend the poor... he defends the widows... he fights for the least of these.

God is angry when people turn their hearts from him and abandon the cross for all sorts of wickedness but its not because his heart is to destroy them or because he is just mad at them... but it is because ultimately his dream for their life is reconciliation back to him. So the idea of God's anger

rising up means he is preparing to take an action that will ultimately be a demonstration of him going after what he loves the most.

God obviously knows what to do with his anger. Do you?

When you get angry, you are defending what you love most *in that moment*.

If someone hurts your wife, or makes her feel no value when you know how valuable she is.... you get angry, because you love your wife. You know how great she is, how could anybody treat her that way...

But if you get angry with *your wife* because she ate the last chocolate chip cookie...

you are angry because you loved the idea of you eating that cookie.

and even though you obviously love your wife more than that cookie, in that moment you are giving priority to an idea. You saw something going a certain way. You saw yourself eating that cookie,

And she took that from you.

anger is a response to what matters to us.

Sometimes we get angry about really stupid things, and sometimes we get angry because we should get angry.

It puts you in this mode... to either attack or defend. And what it is that you are attacking or defending will say a lot about your life.

Because it shows you what really matters to you. Does your ego matter more, or does your marriage? Does justice matter more? Or does comfort?

The problem with anger is that through it, love for one thing can lead to hate toward another.

Look at what the Apostle Paul says about anger.

Ephesians 4:25-27 “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”

First of all... look how clear this is.

Anger is not the sin!

Jesus never sinned, he got angry in the temple. He swung a whip around and threw people out who had turned the temple into a den of thieves. He defended what he loved.

He loved righteousness.

He loved the temple. He loved prayer.. and the purpose for the temple and everything that it represented... so he fought against those who were distracting from its purpose, and profiting off of his people.

We know Jesus didn't sin in that moment, because we know that Jesus never sinned. Jesus loved. Everything he did was because of his love for us. and he came down hard on the people who misrepresented that love.

Paul tells us, its okay to be angry. It is not okay to dwell on it. Think about that... don't let the sun go down on your anger... Process it. Figure out why its there and what it should lead you to change in your life or our world.

don't even let it last for a day.

Because this is the reality of anger. Even though it can be funneled into something that does a lot of good... anger in and of itself is destructive. Sometimes it can be used to destroy things that need to be destroyed... but sometimes it destroys things that were meant to last forever.

Anger can destroy a marriage.
It can destroy a friendship.

It can destroy your life, physically. If you don't know how to react to your anger, your risk of heart attack dramatically increases... your heart rate and breathing goes up, your adrenals go up. and there is only so much of that that anybody can handle.

I read that people who are completely healthy, but are often angry are 19% more likely to get heart disease. We are so concerned about how we eat, and what we take into our bodies and we should be... but we also can't ignore the way we are feeding our bodies through the energy we produce.

Anger is more taxing on your body than anxiety or stress.

It is by nature a destructive energy. It sets you up for a fight. That is what it is. and it can derail your life... and through it you can destroy someone else's life... as Jesus put it in the sermon on the mount. It can lead to the actual taking of a life, because murder begins in the heart.

Its okay to have it. But don't live with it.

Because when you dwell on anger, you are giving an opportunity to the devil. Another version says "Don't let the devil get that kind of foothold on you."

The devil works in the gaps of our lives. He works in the areas of our lives that we leave open to him, and if all he has to do is convince you that you are right, and that whatever you are fighting for is worth the battle when maybe in reality it is not... then he has you. Because the destructive energy will kick in, then you will dig your own grave.

Solomon says it this way in Ecclesiastes 7:9 - "Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.

It lodges. It lives there.

Anger is not something that is inherently bad. But it takes a lot more effort to work out your anger than it does to harvest it.

and that is where we get back to Jesus.

Because when the sermon on the mount reaches that turning point that we talked about last week, when Jesus introduces us to the spirit of the law, he introduces us to the reality that if we go through life moment by moment... play by play, with no actual plan or intention... then we are going to end up finding ourselves breaking all ten commandments anyway, or having them break us.

Jesus frames these next few sections around the concept of intention. You have to live your life in such a way that you are intentional to work out the problems that arise, and that you are intentional to avoid situations that you are not equipped to handle.

If you think that anger is just going to work itself out, you are incredibly deceived.

You may think that it has worked itself out, but really, it has lodged. and it will come back stronger and more angry and more aggressive.

and if it lodges in your heart it will do something to your soul. Paul says the devil will get a foothold... Ecclesiastes says anger lodges... if you fill the space in your life with something that you are not willing to sort through.

and you will lose so much of this precious life dwelling on things that other people did to you, and that other people did wrong, and dwelling on all of the things that went wrong in your life and if you aren't careful, you will blink and find yourself old and bitter and wondering what went wrong?

You have to live your life intentionally. It is not hard to stay mad at someone... it is easy.

it is hard to forgive.

it takes intention to forgive. It takes intention to go to someone who has offended you, or has hurt you, or has made you angry... and to tell them that... and to work it out with them.

It is not hard to let hate settle... it is hard to choose to love in the midst of something not being the way you want it to be.

Hebrew 12:14-15 “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no **“root of bitterness”** springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;”

A Root is something that is buried. We don't see it, or at least we do not see all of it, but we see its fruit. We see what is coming from it. We know what it is producing.

We eventually are going to see it. And it will bleed into every area of your life. It will contaminate every area of your life. It will destroy every area of your life.

Its okay to be angry but you have to know what to do with that anger. You have to know how to funnel it, and how to work it out.

And you have to have enough intention in your life to say “people matter more than emotions do.” Emotions do matter. How you feel matters. But if someone else has hurt you, and you allow a root of bitterness to plant in your heart then it is *you* who Jesus says is wrong. No matter what it is that they did to you.

How many times have we heard it... unforgiveness is like drinking a poison and thinking that it kill the other person. But at the end of the day, who is dead?

You are.

So now, hopefully we have an understanding of anger and how it can be really really bad but it also can be, if funneled in the right direction, and approached with intention... it can be something that is used for absolute good. So, lets look back to Jesus.

He starts this section in the sermon on the mount by saying:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 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.”

Right away, Jesus goes after the intent.

Because what if the bigger problem here is not murder as an act? The action of murder, the transgression of taking someone else’s life is one of the most destructive things that a person can do not only because of what they are taking from someone else but also because how they are elevating themselves...

before taking someones life, a person has to determine in their mind that it is okay for them to be judge... it is okay for them to play God.

What if the bigger problem is you actually believing in your mind that someone else is worth less than you are?

You can’t murder someone without somehow first convincing yourself that it would be okay if they were gone. Without convincing yourself that you should live longer than they should.

That you should keep going, and they should cease to exist.
That you deserve to stay, and they deserve to go.

and that is what anger does to us, doesn’t it?

And we are going to get back to the top half of what Jesus says in a minute because there is an absolute ton packed into this... but I want to show you this about the second half... Jesus in the second half of this passage says:

“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.”

and he kind of marries the two... Anger... and the way we deal with people accusing us, and the way we reconcile with people. Because we already know the danger in harvesting our own anger, but Jesus actually addresses here, how we unintentionally can help harvest someone else's anger, and how that disqualifies us in that moment.

Because Jesus isn't saying here, if you have something against someone else... he is saying “If you know someone has something against you!” make it right, before you come to me. Don't get mad at that person. Don't get angry at that person because they were honest... and don't blow off that person because it could lead them to an unhealthy anger toward you.

And I am going to try and show you how all of this goes together...

First of all, its very hard to be accused of *anything*. Anything at all. Nobody likes that. And quite honestly, at least for me, I am trying to live my life in such a way where I am a transparent and honest person and I want to be approachable when I make mistakes because I know that I make a lot of them, but it is really hard to own those things when someone else points them out to me. This is what we do, and I say we, because right now I am speaking broadly. This is kind of the general response that typically exists in conflict. I am guilty, and this concept is really bad. Its really dumb that we do this, but most of us do.

But what happens is: Someone will bring something to us, they will confront us for something that we probably *are* doing wrong or in some cases maybe it was just a misunderstanding... but someone comes to you with some sort of a complaint against you, which the bible says to do. The first thing Jesus says to do is to take that issue to the person directly... even Paul in the verse we read in Ephesians “put away falsehood, and speak the truth to each other.” Be honest... be real... have open channels of communication.

But what happens often when people do that, is they come to you with something that, maybe they see in you, which quite honestly takes a lot of

bravery to do... but instead of owning it, or at least trying to understand where they are coming from, what we typically do is we get really upset.

and even though we want to believe we have a culture of openness we start to think things like "Who are they to tell ME, that?"

and then this is what we do. The best way to describe it is a latin phrase called "*ad hominem*." and this is the concept.

instead of owning it or at least having a hard but loving conversation... what we do is this:

We respond to arguments by attacking the other person's character, rather than to the content of their arguments.

We say, "well they have this against me, but I have THIS AGAINST THEM."

we try and discredit them.

instead of owning our own sin and making it right, we drag it out by building a case against THEM! Maybe on purpose, or maybe just sort of naturally. We build a case so that the voice that is speaking against us is no longer a credible one.

Its so interesting that Jesus uses the courtroom setting for this because section because isn't that how it works in the courtroom? If you get a witness that is going to blow the case for you, what becomes the objective?

To eliminate the credibility of the witness.

But in the courtroom of life the victim is character.

and maybe we do this publicly, which is really bad... but in most cases we *at least to a degree*, do this internally.

Because we don't want to feel like we are wrong.

it is the farthest thing from the gospel, and it utterly kills healthy communities. It is so screwed up. And I have had it done to me, and I have done it to others. But you have to hear this. Because treating people like this in any situation is simply not okay. Character is off limits when you are angry. It has to be.

And Jesus addresses this as clear as day here.

Jesus says "everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment"

The word that Jesus uses here for anger actually means a "slow burn."

This is not the same as being "slow to anger."

It would be like lighting a candle wick, but putting a firecracker on the other end of it... or perhaps a better visual would be a bomb. You light it, and don't think much of it because there is nine inches of candle wax between the wick and the bottom, so you walk away.

It is going to burn slowly... you may have some time.

but when it gets through the wax and it reaches the end, it is going to explode.

and because maybe it had been burning for so long... when it finally pops, it may feel like it came out of nowhere.

But like Solomon says... it had set up a home in your heart. It was living there... the devil had a foot into the door of your heart and he was slowly feeding the emotions until one day it became too much.

It is one thing.
that leads to another thing.
that leads to another thing.

If you are angry in this place today... generally, consistently angry... your life is a walking time bomb. Literally. Anger is the time bomb of the heart.

and Jesus gives us the process for how that slow burn takes place:

whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council;
whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

The King James puts it this way, "whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council"

Rhaka is the word Jesus actually used there...

rhaka basically means that you are "empty headed" - but there is more to it than just a definition... you are telling the other person... you are not as smart as I am. You are not at my level... you are sizing up a person and in that evaluation you have determined that they are beneath you.

Then, after you have done that...

If you let that slow burn keep burning... then according to Jesus, you are going to be burning for a very long time...

because then Jesus says "but whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

And the word fool that he uses is the word *moros* - its where we get the word "moron" from... but what it is actually saying is that you are a "fool *morally*."

You have to understand this. The word "*moros*" is actually a judgment on someones character. On their morals. On their lifestyle. And its kind of nuts that this one seems to come with the bigger punishment because this is what we do more than anything. We set people apart morally.

That is why we translate the word as "fool" because a "fool" would be someone who makes really really bad decisions. But what you are doing is you are judging their heart.

So Jesus is sort of walking us through this path that happens when we begin to burn with rage toward another human being.

First we call them “rhaka” - we put them in a category that is less human than we are... less worthy than we are... not as good as we are. and then we judge their character, and determine that morally they they are wrong. They do bad things! They deserve punishment.

When you get into the business of character assassination, be it in defensive situations like “ad hominem” or just out of blatant anger toward someone else, and when you get into the business of judging peoples morality then you are treading on a very dangerous line... and whether you admit it or not... you believe in your heart that you have the power to determine if that person is good or bad... and if you have the power to determine if a person is good or bad, then you also would have the power to determine if that person should live, or should die.

and it leads to murder.

You can't kill someone who you believe is as good as you, because then you how could you justify that you get to live and they have to die?

You can't kill someone that you love.

You have first find a reason to hate them. And you before you can hate someone, and feel okay about it, you have to have something in your heart against them, that you think makes them worthy of that hate.

It is a very destructive path in your mind in which you mentally remove their value.

Some of you who were with us last fall may be saying “Wait a second, you told us some of this when we studied the ten commandments.”

and some of it I did. But maybe you need to hear it again. I would give the same message every week if it meant people finally understanding what

people are actually worth... Just how much each other should mean to you. I would be happy to do that. We learn through repetition.

Even The ten commandments... are written in their entirety two different times in the bible, in Exodus 20 and in Deuteronomy 5...

Moses smashed the tablets the first time, when Israel created that golden calf... but God, being slow to anger, gave him the commandments again, and he put them on new tablets.

Then years later, Jesus comes in, and he says, okay, you have heard what Moses said... and it is awesome. God spoke to Moses. Now, here is my view of the ten commandments. Here is my interpretation of what God spoke to Moses. And he dives into this. He says, "yes. absolutely you can not murder. you can never do that. But the way to make sure that you never ever do that is to start with your anger problem."

When something makes you angry, identify it. Identify the injustice that caused it. Identify what your body is preparing itself to defend.

But don't fester on something that was done to you that maybe wasn't right, or maybe it was the right thing it just wasn't what you wanted..

And don't get angry about things that you don't even understand. Take the opportunity to get to know people better. Maybe the circumstance that you are so angry about, actually makes sense in its full context you just are so blinded by your emotions that you can't see the bigger picture.

Identify the moments that light the wicks of your heart and put it out before it burns through.

Because how long can you let a fire burn inside of you before everything turns to ashes. Before its all just gone?

This is slowly destroying you, and it will kill your relationship not only with people but with God.

But what is crazy about what Jesus says is he is not just talking about you. He tells you, you are responsible for other people who are angry in your community.

Jesus says that if someone else's life is filled with that kind of bitterness... those type of disgruntled thoughts toward you, and it hasn't been worked out...

Don't think that YOU can bring a gift to the Lord. You need to figure out what happened that caused that person to have something against you and you need to make it right. Maybe you did nothing to them. Maybe it was a misunderstanding. Maybe they are at fault and they are burying seeds in their heart that will form a root of bitterness...

Go to them! They are your responsibility... and you may say, that's backwards! and it is! And that is the point.

Because the entire message of the sermon on the mount is about a Kingdom, and how you live in a healthy community with the rest of us in that Kingdom.

In this Kingdom, we don't shy away from anger... but we don't feed it either.

and if someone is mad at you, and for whatever reason, they won't come to you, you go to them... because we are accountable to Jesus for the way that we care for one another. For the way that we love one another. For the way that exhort one another as Hebrews says.

One of the biggest mistakes we make when we read the bible, is we read everything through the lens of the one thing we are reading in that moment... Like this... this is anger... this is what Jesus is saying... you can't do this. you can't do this.

rules. regulations. One thing at a time. We do this... then we do that. and on and on and on it goes and we circle trying to keep one rule, and then find ourselves breaking another while trying to keep the first and we miss it.

Because what Jesus really is saying through this entire sermon, is this is a new kingdom. and its upside down. and when we should be defending ourselves instead we humbling ourselves, and going to our brothers and sisters, and reconciling everything every time.

Because that is what feeds health in a community. Because together we are stronger. and because by brokenness we all find ourselves at the feet of the same cross... realizing that we are not better than anyone. We are all sinners who are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ, who willingly let us put him on a cross to kill the hostility in our communities as Paul says in Ephesians 2.

He killed it. He took it on himself so it could die with him.

God has given us each other to make us stronger.

We are a city within a city constantly bringing the Kingdom of heaven to earth. And if we can't get along with each other, here, and we can't control our anger, here... how are we ever going to make any difference to the rest of the world?

The sermon on the mount is about life, here and now. It is about creating communities that take care of each other so that when we approach our city, and approach loving our city, and serving our world, we are doing it out of a place of health, and not a place of resentment. We are bringing a healthy community into Detroit, not a tired, angry, and bitter one.

Love one another guys. Lets close by reading 1 John 4:19-21 together. This is John, the disciple who Jesus loved, writing.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: **whoever loves God must also love his brother.**