

Revolutionary Reconciliation

When Dr Howell asked me to preach during this faculty series I politely declined. “I’m not a preacher,” I said. “I don’t want to,” I said. I didn’t even know what scripture or topic I would be preaching on, but I knew I didn’t want to do it.

Preaching is not my ministry. I am confident in the calling that God has for me: teaching. I have known it since I was a student, sitting where you are. And yet, here I am. Dr. Howell wouldn’t take “no” for an answer. But God has a way of using opportunities like this, situations where you aren’t comfortable, to work on things in you that you otherwise would avoid dealing with.

It was about a month or so later when those of us who were preaching were given the opportunity to select our topic of preference. I thought that maybe if I didn’t respond to the email, sent only to myself and the three others you have heard already this week, that they would forget about the fact that I was supposed to do this. The truth is, I didn’t want to preach on any of those topics. If you know me, you know that I am pretty transparent about the fact that I am a work in progress. When God saved me I was such an emotional mess, with so much baggage. ALL of these topics have been areas where God has dealt with me over the years. So, I let the others make their choices, saying if I still couldn’t get out of this preaching deal then I would just take whatever was left as what God had for me.

God knows what He is doing.

If this sermon touches none of you, the word has still not been ineffective, because the development of it has been transformational for me. I can only hope and pray that I am able to communicate in some way the life-changing truths that have affected me. In this final chapel of the faculty series, I want to talk to you about anger: Release, Repentance, and Reconciliation. I believe that God wants to set some of you free today from the bondage of anger, resentment, and

maybe some broken relationships that are keeping you from experiencing the fullness of what God has for you.

If you get nothing else out of this sermon today, understand this: When we release anger and embrace forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation we can PREVENT future sin and broken relationships, and are able to wholeheartedly worship and live at peace with God and mankind.

This revolutionary commitment to humility and trust in God's sovereign judgement demonstrates radical Gospel love.

"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.' Matthew 5:21-26

Anger Requires Release

Jesus is getting to the heart of what the law said in Exodus and Deuteronomy. The law deals with the ultimate expression of anger: murder. Jesus is getting at the fact that long before a violent act of murder happens, something smaller happens in your heart. It might seem benign, or justified, but it is a cancer, which not treated can consume you. Jesus is explaining that the heart issue of anger must be uprooted before it's given a chance to take hold.

“*Raka*” and “Fool” are insults, sometimes audible, sometimes under your breath, sometimes just in your mind. But they are insults nonetheless. This little bit of contempt, a feeling that a person or a thing is beneath consideration, worthless, or deserving scorn, deserves the same punishment as murder. When we have this sort of contempt for someone, we think that they deserve punishment for how they have offended us. But Jesus says that OUR contempt is a

cancer to the relationship, to the community, and makes us as guilty as a murderer. We are inclined to see sin as a spectrum saying, “anger isn’t as bad as murder.” But guilt isn’t a spectrum, it’s black and white. You’re either guilty or not guilty.

I’m sure it’s happened to you, as it’s happened to me, you’re going along, living your life, when BOOM! An attack comes at you. You didn’t think when you got up this morning you were in a war zone, but you look around and you see a fiery dart headed your way.

Some days it just grazes you a bit, just enough to irritate you, “Raka!” your roommate wakes you up on before your alarm. “Raka!” your roommate keeps their stuff a mess “Raka!” You’re driving down 93 into Boston and someone cuts you off and then slams on the brakes “Raka!” okay, maybe the insult that comes to your mind isn’t “Raka,” but it’s there. The flesh is just below the surface providing you with all sorts of choice insults for those who offend us. We get irritated. We get angry, at least for a while. Sometimes we act on our anger, sometimes we suppress it, then revisit it later and feed it so that it becomes bitterness and resentment. sometimes we let it go. Sometimes we let it ruin our entire day.

Other days the fiery dart actually hits us. Something we have been working so hard for seems about to breakthrough. That paper we put so much time into or the work of our hands that we have been so diligent in... and we are passed by. We don’t get the “A” we think we deserve. or the promotion, or the raise, or the award, or the honor that we worked so hard for. We are met instead with delays and red tape and people who can’t seem to make our plans right. And we are frustrated. We are angry. We are angry with the people who offend us. Sometimes we are even angry with God. Why did we get passed over? Why didn’t God intervene for us? Sometimes we are able to communicate with the other person and resolve it, sometimes we let go of the anger and resolve the conflict. Sometimes we harbor bitterness toward the one(s) who we believe wronged us. Other times we suppress or stifle that anger or direct it toward ourselves, only to blow up later.

Some days those darts miss us, but hit our comrades. Our friend, family member, or significant other has been wronged, exploited, or abused, and there's nothing we can do about it. A car accident. A drunk driver. A bad medical decision. An affair. Abuse. Slander. Lies. And we are left with more questions than answers. and anger. lots and lots of anger. (consider story of mom/kid from church killed by drunk driver; or the father of a daughter killed by a rapist) This is often one of the hardest types of anger to root out. We are like Simeon and Levi, (Genesis 34) who were shocked and furious, because Shechem (son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area) "saw her(Dinah, their sister), he took her and raped her." He had done an outrageous thing and the brothers would not have it. So they convince Amor & Shechem to circumcise all the men in the city then kill them all three days later while the men were still weak and in pain. It was anger and outrage that led to Simeon and Levi murdering the men in the city. And it is HARD, if you have ever seen someone you love wronged to wrestle with that same anger.

Sometimes those fiery darts make a direct, lethal hit. In the heart. In hurts and offenses that we never imagined possible. A breakup. Rape. Theft. Abuse. Exploitation. Betrayal. And there is someone who has sinned against us with whom we are ANGRY. We are OFFENDED. They were wrong, and we do not deserve to be disrespected and treated this way. We exude contempt, thinking they are beneath us and are worthy of punishment. "Bash in the teeth of my enemies, God!" (Psalm 58:6) "or, I could go bash them in for you...?"

Types of Anger

But Jesus was angry, right? He turned the tables of the moneychangers in the temple (Mt 21:12-17). When Peter rebukes Jesus and his plan to die on the cross and rise again, Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Mt 16:21-23) It's true. Jesus was angry. God's wrath is what makes him the ultimate judge. However, God's anger is different from ours.

Righteous Anger is rare. This is when you're angry at what makes God angry. God is angry at what perverts His goodness, or evil. What kind of world would it be if people weren't angry at abuse, rape, theft, etc.? This anger is laced with grief for what has been done to the heart of God and the people He created. Ultimately, this anger finds solace in the fact that God will vindicate. "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom 12:19-21)

Sinful Anger is concerned more with man than with God. It tends to not be righteous, but self-righteous, focused on the offense in relationship to us, "he or she wronged me") This may very well be true, but does not justify harming others, whether emotionally, mentally, or physically. Sinful anger is focused on MY feelings, actions, and attitudes. Continuing in this type of anger and angry thoughts gives the devil a foothold (Eph 4:26 - 27). Hatred and contempt puts our souls in peril, whether through action such as murder and violence, spirit as in attitude and anger), or words such as insults and slander.

Don't we have a RIGHT to be angry? Is Jesus saying that anger itself is a sin? Eph 4:26-27 states "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." It's not the fleeting feeling of anger that is sin in and of itself, it is when we HOLD ON to that anger, and let that anger permeate us and change us, whether in thoughts, words, or actions. When we are unable to deal with the anger, we create a division between ourselves and the person with whom we are angry we give the devil a foothold. This broken relationship is where the devil gets a foothold.

Look at those verses in Ephesians again, they outline many faces of anger: "Get rid of all bitterness, [when anger has festered over time] rage [violent, uncontrolled anger] and anger, brawling [fighting] and slander [making a false spoken statement damaging to a person's reputation], along with every form of malice." [the intention or desire to do evil; ill will, when you WANT something bad to happen to someone] INSTEAD:32 "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

"A kingdom divided against itself can't stand" (Matt 12:25) United we stand, divided we fall. As long as we are divided against our brothers and sisters, we are falling right into the scheme of the enemy. He wants to destroy us, and he will do so through division. Unchecked and unrestrained ANGER divides us.

What are we supposed do when we are angry?

RELEASE it. These small offenses that honestly will not matter to you at all a week or a month from now, just drop it. it doesn't matter who is right. or who takes out the trash. or who thinks you're a bad driver. or whatever. just let it go. don't ruminate on it, don't meditation on it. chose to think about those things that are good and pure and true and lovely. chose to "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." (Phil 2:3) Give them the benefit of the doubt and move on.

Turn the Other Cheek. Go the Extra Mile. Later in this chapter, Jesus will instruct the listeners ""You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."(Mt 5:38-42) This is SO hard.

I do have a caveat here. This does not mean you should continue to take abuse, God has always been concerned with protecting the afflicted, and you can escape from abuse and find hope, peace, and restoration in Christ. Talk to a pastor or counselor.

Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. He goes on in chapter 5 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, “(Mt 5:43-44) But when they hurt me, have offended me, I don’t WANT to pray for them. Maybe we start with good intentions praying for them, but it is so EASY to give in and give up on them. What are we really doing when we don’t pray for them? We are saying that my offense is more important to me than your walk with God, the unsaved, or your eternity. It is more important to me that I get to hold on to this anger and hold it against you than for us to be united, as Jesus longed for us to be in his hour of deepest anguish in the garden of Gethsemane. I would rather be angry at you because of your mistake(s) than demonstrate Christ-like love toward you.

Overcome evil with good. To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Rom 12:19-21)

When you are angry with others, whether they know it or not, whether it is justified or not, we are the ones holding the offense that Jesus tells us makes us “liable to judgment; liable to the council; and liable to the hell of fire.” I won’t get into the details of each of these, but friends, I know I don’t want to be liable [responsible by law; legally answerable.] If you’ve got anger, Jesus says you are liable, so we have GOT to deal with it!

Forgiveness does not excuse the offense. It doesn’t make it okay, or acceptable. Forgiveness means that we choose to no longer hold that offense against them.

What are the consequences if we don’t forgive?

I struggled for a long, long, time with anger toward my father. I didn't know what TRUE forgiveness, true unconditional love was, even from God, because I kept holding on to this offense that placed me squarely in the role of VICTIM. It was always about me. That's what anger and smoldering bitterness and resentment over time does to you. The enemy takes that little unresolved anger and uses it to isolate you and keep your feelings, your hurt, your offense at the center of your being, not your identity in Christ as a forgiven and beloved son or daughter.

I talked to a professor at GCTS, and he helped me to see who my real enemy is. The enemy was truly the one dividing me. My father was a frail, unsaved man who was susceptible to the enemy's whispering influence. When I realized this, I saw him for who he was, a sinner, just like me. When I make mistakes, I want others to forgive me, but it's harder to let go and release forgiveness. It is possible, even when they don't ask for it. I was able to let go of my anger and be free. Ultimately, releasing forgiveness releases ME from the bondage of anger, victimization, etc. These things that BLOCKED, they inhibited me from seeing God for who He is and accepting the fullness of His love and grace were released that day, and I have never ever been the same

2 cor 5:16-21 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Since we have been reconciled to God, we need to be about the business of reconciling others to Him. Those who are already in Christ, and those who are not.

I know some of you are wondering, "what if they are still wronging, hurting, or sinning against me?" This is a tricky question. If someone hurts, offends, or sins against you once, okay.

It's usually relatively easy to forgive them. Maybe they were having a bad day. Maybe they were hungry. Maybe they woke up on the wrong side of the bed. We can forgive them. It doesn't make whatever they did RIGHT, but we can forgive them.

But when they just keep doing it? Maybe you've got a family member who keeps letting you down. They say they're going to do something, but they drop the ball over and over again. Maybe you've got someone who is spreading lies, gossip, or slander about you. Someone who keeps putting you down and pointing out your flaws. A boyfriend or girlfriend, husband or wife who is still struggling with an addiction to pornography, alcohol, or some other substance. Someone in the church or at work who continually challenges your authority and disrespects you. What then?

Jesus had something to say about this. Check out Mathew 18:15-35

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they

were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

We have experienced repeated forgiveness from God, some of us for the same offense, over and over and over again. We have a very tangible example in Christ. Imagine if God drew a line in the sand and said, "You know what? I'm done forgiving this sinner for this. He keeps disrespecting me. She continually takes me for granted and assumes I'll always be here to forgive her. Well, you know what? Not this time." Can you imagine? What sort of grace is that? Grace doesn't have an expiration date, or a limit. As long as we are in Christ, He has released us from our debt and he has clearly commanded us to release others as well. Remember, that releasing them, actually frees US and prevents us from falling prey to the deeper form of anger, ultimately leading to bitterness, resentment, violence, or at the extreme, murder. Notice that the servant never paid what he owed. The debt was there. Forgiveness releases the debt before the offender has made it right, sometimes before they even ask for forgiveness. It takes a commitment each day to wake up and give the other person the benefit of the doubt. That today might the day they decide to break the pattern.

Repentance causes Anger to Recede

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. ' Matthew 5:23-26

Jesus was speaking to people who would be coming a long way only a couple times a year to bring their sacrifice. This was a BIG deal. The implication is that reconciliation is of utmost

importance. In fact, to “make it right” with a brother or sister, they would potentially have to travel for a day or more to find them and make it right.

Notice also, that there is language here that insinuates that you are in the wrong here. So, maybe someone else is mad at you, and you haven’t done what you could to make it right. This is going to require something that is very rare in our society: HUMILITY. Maybe it’s an apology, or an acknowledgement that they were right. Maybe it’s a conversation to clear the air. Whatever it is, we need to humble ourselves before our brother or sister as we humble ourselves before God. We need to do our part to make it right. We’ve got to be willing to follow through with repentance to BOTH God and the person we have wronged. An apology goes a LONG way in restoring the relationship

Our worship looks different from what it did in Jesus’ day, but the concept is the same. When we are at odds with others we are not free to fully express our gift of praise to God. I’m sure you’ve experienced this. You come to chapel or church and you’ve had a rough day or week, and you just aren’t feeling it. Rather than praising God with abandon, you’re distracted, thinking about your own selfish problems. Your hands are less inclined to raise, and if they do, it’s more out of obedience. When we raise our hands in worship, we are in a posture of true surrender, and when we harbor anger against our brother or sister, we may be willing to surrender some of ourselves, but just NOT THAT AREA.

There have been times, several, in fact, when God showed me that I needed to forgive or apologize, to release that wound or my “right” to Him and trust that He will use it for good. Times when God wanted me to make it right, to RECONCILE with someone that I was not ready to reconcile with. Ultimately, obedience to God, and trusting Him is the ultimate motivator. Things are not okay with you and your Father so long as you are harboring anger, resentment, bitterness, malice, for others. It’s hard. But remember who your enemy is.

Reconciliation Occurs When We Do All We Can to Restore the Relationship.

How can we make reconciliation happen? Jesus calls us to this ministry of reconciliation. It is of utmost importance to Him that we are united and pursuing grace in our relationships. However, alone you can not make reconciliation happen. it takes 1 to forgive, 2 to reconcile. You aren't responsible for reconciliation, let the Holy Spirit take care of that. But you ARE responsible for forgiveness, releasing your anger, and humbly repenting with the motivation to restore the relationship and reconcile.

Revolutionary reconciliation is a recognition of the ministry of reconciliation that God has called us to. You KNOW it takes forgiveness and humility to show the love of God to others. Demonstrate this to others and be free from anger and watch as God floods you with peace and reconciles others to Him through you.

If you are here today and you KNOW that you are struggling with one of the many faces of anger, it's time to release it and be free from your bondage. I urge you to remember who your real enemy is. He wants to destroy you. He will use your offense, your anger, to do it. See past the ploys of the enemy and release your "foe." Remember how you are forgiven in the completed work of Christ and seek to forgive the way that he has forgiven you. God will overflow you with peace as you do this. It will take a commitment. There will be times when the thoughts come back to your mind and you want to dwell on that offense some more. You have a choice. DON'T do it. It's time to take back the footholds we have given to the enemy and tell him that HE will not have you in this!