

Reconciliation: The Vaccine for Anger, Mt. 5:21-26

Josiah Haas

Intro: Good morning First Free;

Thanks to Pastor Jason

Thank elders for leading us in the midst of hard times

There is a virus that is sweeping our country:

Impacting everyone

Illuminated by the media and social media

Killing people

Causing division

You may think you know what virus I'm talking about

I'm not talking about the coronavirus- though we do have a coronavirus problem

I'm talking about the other virus that's struck our country: the anger virus

Let's face it: America has serious anger problems

White mad at someone who's black; Black: mad at someone who's white

White and you're mad at someone who's white that's mad at someone who's black

Black you're mad at black people who don't seem to get it

Repub to Dem and Dem to Repub; Moderates are mad at both sides

Mask wearer to no mask b/c they're not loving people

No mask to mask wearer b/c they're not living in faith

Now I know you might be thinking: I think I've heard enough about viruses these days

Here goes the pastoral apprentice off with a crazy analogy

But friends this is the world we live in; we have caught an anger virus

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If you don't see it then you're not looking very hard. America has an anger virus.

Does the Bible have anything to say about America's anger problem?

Could Jesus' words spoken 2,000 years ago give the solution to our anger virus?

Is it possible that the rage that's swept our country really be combatted through something Jesus said?

Segue

God's Word is living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword. It speaks into our lives and what we're experiencing right here and right now. In God's providence, the passage we're looking at this morning speaks directly into our anger problem. Through the words of Jesus, we are going to unravel 3 realities about our anger virus. We'll be looking at the text Matthew 5:21-26, so turn there with me after I pray and ask God to be our teacher:

Pray: confess our anger problem and ask God to help us

Let's begin this morning by looking at Matthew 5:21-22. We know we have an anger virus, so first we need to look at this question: what is the impact of our anger? To find this out let's look to God's word. Read along with me:

²¹"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

First you've gotta understand the context of what's happening here
 Sermon on the Mount: Jesus' first block of teaching in Matthew
 The purpose: to show how to live a life of flourishing
 He's given the beatitudes and shown how God's kingdom is an upside-down kingdom
 He's talked about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world
 Just before this, he's claimed that he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it

Now, he launches into 6 sections where he says, "You have heard it said... but I tell you..."
 And here he says, "You have heard it said, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment."

Where would they have heard this from?
 He's quoting Exodus 20:13, the sixth commandment
 Jesus is quoting God's words as spoken through the prophet Moses

I wanna make a connection here for us that would have been obvious for the original audience but may not be as obvious to us
 The connection is this: Jesus is being portrayed as the new Moses

If you don't know who I'm talking about, listen to who Moses was
 In the Old Testament, Moses is the leader of Israel
 First, Moses spent 40 years in the desert while the Israelites were in slavery
 There, God chose Moses to stand up to Pharaoh and bring them deliverance
 So, Moses went to Pharaoh and brought Israel out through God's hand
 Through Moses God parted the Red Sea so they could cross to the other side
 Then he goes up to Mount Sinai to get the 10 Commandments
 He comes down to tell the Israelites what God's standard was
 To tell them how they are to live

As Jesus is preaching, do you not think some lightbulbs are going off in peoples' heads?
 Just in the last chapter, Jesus had spent 40 days in the wilderness
 As Jesus is up on a mountainside
 He's preaching
 Giving God's standard and telling them how they are to live
 Matthew, as the author of this gospel is characterizing Jesus as a new and better Moses
 And just like Moses brought liberation to the enslaved Israelites...

Matthew is going to show how Jesus is delivering all people from their bondage to sin

Jesus quotes Moses and says that a murderer becomes subject to judgment

He's not lessening this, and neither should we:

Friends, murder is wrong and against God's standards

The recent deaths of George Floyd and others have shown that we can't be naïve to think that murder doesn't still happen all the time

Just over the 4th of July weekend, 17 people were murdered in Chicago alone

It's been happening for thousands of years since Cain killed Abel

But it's occurrence should not make us complacent to the fact that murder is a sin

As Christians, we should respond by lamenting injustice

We mourn with those who mourn

We seek to show God's love and to exercise a biblical view of justice

A murder is subject to judgment- that's not the hard saying

That's something I think we can all agree on

The hard saying is the next part:

²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

You have heard that murder brings judgment

But I say that anger against a brother brings judgment!

This would have caught the Pharisees by surprise

They have been strictly following the law

They were legalistic about the law

And they think that as long as they haven't killed someone that they're good

But is Jesus just adding rules to previous rules?

No- Jesus pushes them deeper

Now notice he doesn't say that anger and murder are the same- he says they are both worthy of judgment

Jesus is saying that this has been God's heart the entire time

The Pharisees thought that as long as they didn't murder then they'd be good

But they missed the heart of the law they were following

Jesus shows them that being part of the kingdom of God is not just an external act

Jesus is saying: I want your heart

Your heart is just as important as your actions

And I want your heart to be permeated by the heart of God

That murderous act started with an angry thought

And I want away with that too

This would have been a tough pill to swallow for the Pharisees

Jesus is actually relating anger to murder

We need to let that connection sink in

We must let it stand if we're going to understand what Jesus is saying

*First Reality about our anger problem: **Anger is a Virus that Kills***

What is a virus?

I'm sure you all know by now, but just in case you don't

A virus is an infective agent that is too small to be seen but often manifests itself in outward symptoms

Anger is a Virus

Infective: it spreads easily and can consume you

Too small to be seen: it always starts inside of us. It starts in our hearts

Manifests outwardly: anger shows itself through our words and actions

Here's an example for the kids out there

I know you kids have been watching the regular services for a long time now

So, here's an example you might know that's helpful for all of us

In the Veggie tales classic, "Larry Boy and the Angry Eyebrows," an army of eyebrows attack Bumblyburg and attach themselves whenever someone gets angry. The anger spreads throughout the entire town, even to Larry Boy the hero of the story. Town is angry and having food fights, like America in 2020. All hope seems lost. Everything is going to be destroyed. Until Larry Boy remembers the words of his teacher, "If you hold onto your anger, your anger will hold onto you." So, he lets go of his anger, and he saves the entire town of Bumblyburg.

Anger is a virus; and it's a virus that kills

Not convinced that your anger is that serious? Let me tell exactly who anger kills

Anger Kills Others

Jesus relates anger to murder, and that's something we have to think about

In our anger, we can destroy others

We can undermine them

Cut them down

It's easy in our anger to make a snarky comment that makes us look good

It's easy in our anger to hastily respond on social media in a way that embarrasses the other person.

It's easy to do because anger is a virus that kills others

Anger doesn't just kill others: Anger Kills You too

When you're angry, it can easily consume you
 It can take over and turn you into the dark side of yourself
 Anger can rip out your joy and cause you to live in constant bitterness
 And ultimately our anger brings us under God's judgment. Jesus said...

²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

“Raca” means something like “empty-head” and was an obvious insult
 Answerable to the Sanhedrin- the supreme court of the land
 And calling someone a fool is in danger of the fire of hell
 Jesus is referring to the valley of Gehenna which served as the garbage dump
 This valley became a symbol of the destruction of the evil after death

Each of these examples points to God's judgment on our anger
 God's judgment bar is far higher than that of the world
 For in the world, there can be indictment for murder
 But in God's court, there is indictment for anger too
 Ultimately, the consequence of our sin in anger is eternal punishment of death and separation from God

Now don't interpret Jesus wrongly
 There is a righteous anger and not all anger is sin
 There is a place to be angry at sin and injustice
 Jesus himself had moments of righteous anger

But the problem is that we very rarely have truly righteous anger
 Instead our anger is mostly at a personal offense
 It has our ego wrapped up in it
 It's selfish and self-serving
 And in that anger, we act in very harmful ways

Anger is a virus that kills
 America, we have a serious problem on our hands

If anger is the virus, then what's the vaccine? What is the vaccine to anger?

Let's read the next two verses: verses 23-24

²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Vaccine: a product that stimulates a person's immune system to produce immunity to a specific disease, protecting the person from that disease

Anger is our virus, but we're not hopeless.

There is a vaccine; there is protection.

Here's our second reality about our anger problem to know this morning:

The Vaccine to Anger is Reconciliation

Reconciliation is about right relationships

In the Bible we see two main avenues of reconciliation that we are called to

The first isn't the main point of this passage, but I'd be remiss to say nothing about it

First: Reconciliation with God

Reconciliation is always God's initiative!!!

Romans 5:8-11

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Friends our anger deserves the judgment of God

But while we were still sinners, God initiated reconciliation

He sent Jesus to die that we might be reconciled to God

Jn. 3:16- God loved first, so he initiated reconciliation
*When you didn't even exist, he initiated
*When you hated him, he initiated

In view of our sin and our anger, be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ

Because only through the vaccine of salvation through Jesus Christ are you immune to the wages of your sin, which is eternal punishment

Scripture calls us to reconcile with God, but this passage is primarily concerned with a different reconciliation: Reconciliation with others

Reconciliation is never solely vertical, it's also horizontal

Yes, it is extremely important to reconcile with God

In fact, in the example Jesus gives, the person is on the way to give a sacrifice on the altar

They are seeking right relationship with God through the sacrificial system

But Jesus pushes us and says it's just as important to reconcile with others

Let me contemporize Jesus' words for you:

If you're on your way to church and the Holy Spirit convicts you that you've hurt someone else in your anger, turn the car around and go reconcile with them first!

Church is no excuse for you to ignore reconciling with others!!!

Jesus again insists that we often miss the heart of God's Word

We like satisfying our religious duties on a regular basis:
 Putting on our nice clothes and showing up to church and calling it good
 COVID: turn on a computer in your pajamas!
 But true religion would lead you to reconcile with your neighbor

2 Corinthians 5:17-18 says this:

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

We as Christians were reconciled by God... to be reconcilers
 He gave us the ministry of reconciliation!!

Anger is going to happen in your life
 It's just a reality
 You're going to say things that will hurt others
 And others are going to hurt you

But there is a vaccine to our anger: that vaccine is reconciliation
 The ministry of Christians is one of reconciling with others
 When you sinned against God, He initiated reconciliation with you through Jesus
 Your calling as a follower of Jesus is to initiate reconciliation with others
 To live with others at peace as much as you are able to

Now at this point of the sermon some of you might be thinking of specific situations in your life that need reconciliation.

But you're not quite convinced that this really needs to happen
 You definitely don't want to do that right now
 You might be asking this question: How urgent is reconciliation? Does it really need to happen?

²⁵ "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

To end this passage, Jesus uses a legal metaphor
 In the first century, if you have a debt that you can't pay, you can get thrown in prison
 While you're there you're not working, so you have no way to pay off the debt
 Basically, you're toast! You're trapped and you're not gonna get out.
 It's going to take an enormous effort from your family and loved ones to pay off the debt
 So, you need to reconcile NOW

Jesus is stressing here at the end of this passage how urgent reconciliation is
 And this leads us to our last point: **Reconciliation Requires First Responders**

In our global pandemic of COVID-19, the doctors and nurses and others on the front lines have been the first responders

They've fought the virus and sought to protect others from this spreading even more
They've saved many lives

To those people who are in our congregation and who are watching: thank you!!!!

The virus of anger in our world requires first responders too

Reconciliation requires first responders

While not everyone can be on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic,
everyone is called to be a first responder for the kingdom of God.

The church is called to be people who are reconciled to be reconcilers

It's part of our very mission as the body of Christ!!

As a body requires each part to play its part, reconciliation requires each of us to play our part too

Where might you be called to seek reconciliation? *Let me give you some ideas

With your Family

The people we hurt are often the people we see the most

Family life can get VERY messy

Maybe you need to reconcile with someone in your family so that you can work through some things and move forward

Go and seek reconciliation

Political Opposites

Politics are very dicey

And it's an election year

When political conversations heat up, it's easy to let insults fly in our anger

Maybe you've duked it out with your political opposite, and you need to seek reconciliation with them.

Racial Reconciliation

Because of the institution of slavery, one of the deepest historical divides in this country is that of black and white.

On the one hand, the church has historically fought for racial reconciliation; while on the other hand often the church has prohibited reconciliation from occurring

Still now, there is much animosity across races in the wake of the recent deaths of black people.

Church, we are called to reconciliation.

We must seek to step forward and reconcile with our brothers and sisters of different races.

We must enter into relationship and seek understanding with those different than us.

We must choose to be first responders of reconciliation.

Friends, Anger is a virus that kills.



Impacting everyone Illuminated by the media and social media Killing people Causing division
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It's spread across our country and across our world.
But we're not without hope: the vaccine to anger is reconciliation.
And that reconciliation requires first responders.

First Free, may we be a church that seeks to be ambassadors of reconciliation.
Let's respond now in a time of worship and surrender to God.

Benediction: Hear now this benediction from 2 Corinthians 5. It's the continuation of what we looked at before.

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here!¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

Go therefore as Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation to the world. Go in peace.