

Stand Alone Sermon: The Healing of Anger

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[0 : 00] Today's scripture reading is taken from Matthew chapter 5 verses 21 to 26.! Please follow along in your own Bibles or on the screen. And if you don't have a Bible, please grab one around the hall.

Our passage is on page 760 in this Bible. Starting from verse 21, we read, 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 offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court.

[1 : 12] Lest the 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.

This is the word of God. Good morning, Watermark. It's wonderful to be here. Wonderful to see you all.

Thank you for having us. It really is fantastic to be here in your new venue this morning. And it's a privilege to be sharing with you. We really have a lot of affection for this church.

We've had members of Watermark move to Singapore. Ryan and Catherine, some of you may remember them. They're part of our Mandarin church plant. Dorcas also recently moved to Singapore and has been with us.

And I know there are many others as well. This morning we actually have Sean and Rachel from RHC who are visiting as well. So some RHC is here too. And that's the nature of Singapore and Hong Kong.

[2 : 09] There is a lot of movement backwards and forwards. But it really is a wonderful privilege to be speaking to you today. This church, what I always hear about this church, from people from Watermark, from Kevin, from others, two main things that always stand out to me.

Firstly, your warmth and your love as a church, the sense of tight community that you have, how you care for one another. And then secondly, I always seem to hear stories of people coming to faith, coming to know Jesus in this church.

And I think God has really given you a grace that has enabled you to be very evangelistically fruitful. And those are two very, very beautiful things. And I trust that as you move into this new space, which is absolutely wonderful, that God will continue to see these two things strengthened.

And I'm sure that this space is about those two things happening. More and more people coming to know Jesus and be folded into this tight-knit, beautiful community. So it really is a privilege to be here today.

I'm going to be speaking this morning on the healing of anger. Some of you may wonder, why on earth am I speaking about this? Did Kevin say to me, hey, if there's one thing you could talk about, could you please speak about this?

[3 : 18] I would like to let you know that that did not happen at all. But as we'll see a little bit later, this is actually a wonderful text for a couple of reasons. Firstly, I think what Jesus says applies to more of us than we think.

Secondly, I think this text does help us think a little bit more about our relationships with one another. It also helps us think more deeply about God and how we view him and his work through Jesus and how that applies to our hearts.

So I trust it will be encouraging for us this morning. So let me begin. I don't know how many of you have heard of Alexander the Great. He was a great conqueror. He conquered many, many lands, many nations.

But there was one thing that he was unable to conquer, and that was his own anger, his own temper. And in fact, one evening during a banquet, he had had too much to drink, and some of his usual filters were taken down.

And he got into an argument with one of his confidants and someone who was a very close friend, someone who had actually saved his life previously. And in his incredible rage, he ended his life and woke up in the morning and lived with a huge sense of regret, which we'll hear a little bit about later.

[4 : 32] But he was a man who had such power, such control, had so much influence over others, and yet there was something inside of him that he wasn't able to control. And I want to ask you this morning if you are or if you think you are an angry person.

The reason I'm asking that this morning is because most angry people or many angry people don't think that they are angry. I never ever thought I had any anger issues. And the reason I thought I didn't have any anger issues was because it's not my habit to shout or scream.

I certainly don't or never have, I don't think, thrown things around the house. And I thought, okay, well, I'm clearly not an angry person. But as time went on, I began to realize anger is far more pervasive than just those things.

It has many, many forms. Some of us may have mastered the art of the passive-aggressive form of anger. Anybody here? Please do not dig your spouse in their ribs, all right?

What about irritability? In fact, what convinced me that I was an angry person was when I read a Desiring God article about 12 years ago on the roots of irritability and how irritability is a form of anger that is just under a certain kind of control.

[5 : 49] And I realized I actually have a lot of, I can be very irritable. I can be very, very, very, very, very, very, maybe a certain tone of voice or body language to control.

Maybe for some people here, it manifests as a kind of bitterness or a deep desire that you never act out on, but you play over and over in your mind this desire for revenge. What about in our culture, how cancel culture is such a huge thing?

Isn't that a form of anger? Maybe this morning you recognize you are very easily triggered, like a tightly coiled spring, just waiting to be let loose.

Some people, many people that I have had to counsel over the years struggle, it seems like legitimately, with a sense of anger at deep injustice that they have faced.

People often, I find in Asia, have experienced deep, deep injustice that has affected them very, very deeply, but they found there's no way for them to resolve it, to engage, to confront, to have proper resolution of those things.

[6 : 59] And because there's no outlet, it's just grown and grown inside of them. Now, when you and I are prone to, when we are inclined to think about anger, and we think about Jesus speaking about anger, we are probably likely to think about the harm that our anger can do to those around us, loved ones, etc.

And Jesus certainly is not unaware of those things. He speaks here about murder and anger. He equates those kinds of things. And so whether it's physical violence, whether it's verbal anger, whether it's emotional abuse, all of these things certainly have a very destructive force upon other people.

And this is probably a good time to say that if you are or have been in any kind of an abusive relationship, it really is important for you to get safe and to get help.

And nothing I say this morning should be taken as a way to justify you remaining in a situation that you are physically unsafe in. But when we're inclined to think about anger, we probably think about the harm that our anger may do to others.

But I want us to notice here in our text today, the way Jesus is motivating us is not by getting us to think about the harm it will do to others, though that's absolutely true. He actually wants us to think about the harm that our anger does not to other people, but does to us.

[8 : 18] So look at verse 22, verse 25, verse 26. I say to you, everyone who's angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council.

Whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire. Come quickly to terms with your accuser while you're going with him to the court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge and the judge to the God and you be put in prison.

Truly I say, you will never get out until you've paid the last penny. Interestingly here, Jesus is trying to motivate us by getting us to think about anger's effect upon our own hearts, spiritually and relationally.

And this means, I think every one of us recognize we probably do need some help in this regard. And years of pastoral ministry have shown me people typically need help in this area in two ways.

Number one, dealing with a feeling of anger in our own hearts. How do we let this go? Can we? And secondly, knowing how to constructively engage with those that we have conflicts with.

[9 : 22] And fortunately, in this passage today, Jesus does mention both of these. So we'll see two things briefly this morning. Firstly, the problem with anger and secondly, a path out of anger. So let's start with the path, the problem of anger.

When we think about this text, what Jesus is doing, we don't have time to look at it in detail. Jesus is picking up aspects of the Old Testament law, the Torah, and he is fleshing them out by showing the true heart of the law.

And one good way to think about the Old Testament law is that what the law in the Old Testament negatively prohibits, it does so in order to positively encourage the opposite behavior.

It's like if Kev or one of the leaders here says, we'd really like to ask you not to be late on Sunday. They're not just asking you not to be late, they're asking you to positively be on time and early, right?

And so, when the law speaks about not doing various things, it is urging us to love, to care for God's, to care for those around us.

[10 : 23] So, let's ask ourselves, what exactly is this anger? In verse 21 and 22, let's read in our text, Jesus says, you've heard it was said to those of old, you shall not murder and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you, everyone who's angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council. Whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire.

Jesus here is really getting to the spirit of the law. He's trying to show us the heart of it. We think even of the Old Testament, how the Old Testament even had laws about like building parapets or balustrades on top of the roof of your house lest somebody fall off by accident.

The heart of that is this care and concern for other people that is so deeply concerned for their well-being that when you're building a house, you're thinking about safety precautions lest somebody accidentally harm themselves.

And in that spirit of the law, Jesus is saying the way that we view and treat and feel in our hearts toward other people really, really matters. And I think the three clauses or phrases Jesus uses here help us think a little bit about anger.

[11 : 37] He speaks about being angry, he speaks about insulting, and he speaks about calling someone a fool. I think we can think of these as like three kind of facets of the diamond of anger that help us see what he's talking about.

The word anger is something which would exist in our heart. the word is kind of like a burning rage that you nurse, like a fire that is continuing to burn inside of you.

The word insult, this is when you demean someone. You make a judgment of them. You judge them by defining them in your own heart and your own mind.

You say to them, I, I mean, internally in your heart, I declare you to be an idiot. All right? There's this sense that you're summing them up and concluding who they are.

And then the last word, fool, interestingly, the Greek word is the root of which is the word that in English we sometimes, the word moron, when you call someone a moron, it's like when you call someone an airhead or a moron.

[12 : 41] I don't know how you typically use that language. You don't have to tell me about it right now. But typically, if you call someone a moron or an idiot like that, the way that it's often used is in a very dismissive kind of a way.

That guy's just a moron. I do not have time for you. Can you just get out of my way and out of my life? And what is being spoken of here is a kind of indifference, a dismissing, not treating someone as they really should be treated.

And if we put all these three things together, I think a good definition that we can get of anger that the kind of anger Jesus is referring to here is an attitude of heart that demeans the other person, setting yourself up as a God over them to define, judge, and then ultimately dismiss them.

And I think this captures what Jesus is speaking of here. Sometimes we want to nurse a kind of bitterness because we may legitimately see things that have happened to us that we think are wrong and may legitimately have been wrong.

We legitimately have suffered. We do not believe that there is a God of justice who will ultimately hold all people to account. And we think if I don't exact my revenge on them, even if that revenge is just my own anger toward them in my own heart, there will be no justice.

[14 : 06] And therefore, because we don't fear God or we don't believe that he is there to execute justice, we take it upon ourselves to do. We judge, we dismiss, we write off, we nurse grudges in this way.

Now, there are some who at a point like this would probably and legitimately be asking, hold on, hold on. What about those people in the world who really, really do commit great acts of evil?

How do we think about such people? Friends, the Bible, the Christian Bible certainly gives us very clear categories in which to understand evil. If we don't have God, if we don't have his righteousness, we don't have proper categories in which to really understand that which is right and wrong.

And the scriptures really do affirm and show us there are actions and ways of treating people that are wicked and certainly are worthy of judgment. And the Bible is not saying that we are to act as though everybody's behavior is acceptable and fine.

The scriptures themselves give us those categories in which to make right judgments. So when we see people who legitimately do do evil and wicked things as Christians, I want to tell us this morning, it's entirely possible, it's right actually, for us to hate evil, for us to hate injustice, to legitimately see where we may have been wronged, but we refrain from taking the place of God ourselves.

[15 : 35] It may be possible in certain situations that we do need to react to somebody else's evil or their sin. It could be possible for Christians and right in some circumstances, if you see someone else being harmed, for you even to step in and forcibly maybe stop somebody from sinning or harming another person, that's absolutely legitimate and that's what the Bible would describe as love.

But when in our hearts we don't just want to see what is wrong being stopped, but we want to see the wrongdoer destroyed, when we want to see them pay for their sins, we want them to be destroyed, we dismiss them, we're moving from just enacting justice and trying to love other people rightly and we're taking the place of God in our own hearts.

We are moving into an unrighteous anger that can be evil itself. And friends, I want us to notice that Jesus says this kind of anger is really bad. it's really bad for us both spiritually, it's really bad for us relationally.

How is it bad for us spiritually? Well, let's just notice what he says. If you go back and look at the text, I mean, think about the words that Jesus speaks about. He speaks about the danger of the council. He speaks ultimately about the danger of hell.

What is Jesus saying here? I mean, hell in Matthew's gospel is a place where we are alienated from the presence of God. where we're separated from him and ultimately are destroyed.

[17 : 10] Jesus is really warning us to say, if we nurse this kind of thing where we're taking the place of God, dismissing people, wanting them destroyed, setting ourselves as the ultimate judge over them, this is going to have profound spiritual effects upon us.

Now, I think this is so bad for at least three reasons. Firstly, unrighteous anger slanders the image of God. Unrighteous anger slanders the image of God.

It's one of the most beautiful and wonderful teachings of the scriptures that every single human being is made in the image of God. God. And the Bible tells us that sin has marred that image.

We do not reflect God's glory perfectly. In fact, many of us reflect it very, very poorly. And yet the scriptures say, even after the fall, we still retain the dignity of being God's image bearers, though we reflect it so badly.

and we're to treat other Christians, sorry, not just other Christians, other human beings, all human beings, as image bearers of God. Now, I am from Singapore, and you would know in this part of the world there are many temples that are on just about every corner.

[18 : 27] Can you imagine how people would feel, worshippers in a temple around the corner would feel if somebody walked in with a massive axe and began to swing at some of the idols and gods that are set up in that temple.

It would be outrageous. And the scriptures show us that this entire creation, this world that we live in, is a temple to the glory of God with every human being, what, seven, eight billion of them on the planet at the moment, image bearers of God.

And the way that we treat those image bearers and view them is a reflection of our view toward God at some level. So unrighteous anger is particularly bad because we are slandering the image of God which speaks something to how we're treating God himself.

Secondly, unrighteous anger, I think even more seriously, sets us up in our own hearts to take the place of God. When we decide that we will be the ultimate judge, we will make permanent decisions about someone, dismiss them in a certain way, we are setting ourselves up in the place of God.

And friends, the scriptures show us we cannot do this without this having a profound effect upon our own hearts. The Bible shows us so clearly over and over whenever we displace God, we end up idolizing something or someone else.

[19 : 58] In fact, I've seen so often how people who trust in people above God, then when those people let them down and disappoint them, there's a deep anger that begins to grow.

But more than that, our hearts do become profoundly disordered when we take the place of God. Romans 1 shows us that when we replace God and we set ourselves up as gods, one of the effects of that is a kind of spiritual blindness in our lives.

I think the language that Romans 1 uses is we become futile in our thinking. I don't know how many of you have ever seen this play out in your own life.

This means that when other people sin against us, and we become angry with them, we become blind to our own sinful response to their sin.

I don't know if this has ever happened to you. Someone sins against us, and we feel we're just filled with a huge sense of rage. But instead of being aware of how wrong our anger is, and how we're now treating them in a very unfair way, or judging them, or misunderstanding their motives, we're just locked in and focused on their own errors.

[21 : 13] And so often, I find for myself, I'm tempted into sin because someone sinned against me. And just because someone sinned against me doesn't justify me sinning against them, but in my anger, I get blind to my own sinful response to them.

And if you're like me, then you probably start to feel justified. You think certain things, you act in a certain way, maybe indulge in more gossip about them, you say things about them, scripture clearly says that we shouldn't do, but you're entirely blind to it because it feels entirely justified because of how bad they are.

In other words, when we set ourselves up in this way, we can see even in our own hearts, there's a blindness that creeps in, that affects us. And finally, unrighteous anger shows, I think most seriously, Matthew 6 will show us in the next chapter, that we have not properly received God's mercy.

There's something in our own hearts that have not truly understood the nature of who God is. What about relationally? And this, I don't need to spend as much time on this morning, the passage shows relationally even in terms of just your own self.

There's an accuser, there's the threat of court, of jail, not getting out until you've paid the last penny. I mean, this text is saying there can be real social and relational and practical implications to not managing our anger properly.

[22 : 34] And I don't know how many of you, maybe it's true of you this morning, maybe you know others, who find themselves trapped in relational prisons because of unforgiveness, because of bitterness, because of anger.

You refuse to forgive, you refuse to let something go, and you find yourself more and more estranged, withdrawn. It begins to affect you more and more.

Alexander the Great, when he woke up the next morning and realized what he had done, it affected his life profoundly, plunged into a deep depression, and he could hardly recover from it.

What about ending his life on multiple times? It was deep self-loathing. Friends, I'm sure we can think of multiple ways these kinds of things affect us.

In other words, the effect is not even just on those that we are angry with, and that would take another entire sermon to unpack those things. But let's remember here, Jesus is actually motivating us by asking, what does this do to our own hearts?

[23 : 39] spiritually, our relationship with God, our view of him, our understanding of his mercy, our sense of self, and all of this means, friends, that these anger issues that Jesus is talking about here are really not minor.

They are significant, and they're things we need to pay close attention to. It may be a good idea, don't do it now, but to ask a friend if you feel like, I don't have any anger issues at all.

Maybe you can ask a friend, a close friend, ask a spouse, pick your moment carefully, wait till there's time for a longish conversation. I see some of you jabbing one another here and there, but we really should take this seriously.

So what exactly is the path out of anger? And I think as I mentioned earlier, we really need help with this command in two ways. I think we need help with both dealing with the negative emotions and feelings that we feel in our own hearts, and then secondly, knowing just some tips or some help and how do we practically reach out to others?

And fortunately, Jesus does mention both of these. So let's look firstly at the vertical path, our own hearts. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount has been speaking to his people over and over about their need for a deeper righteousness, a righteousness that is rooted in a correct view of God, not a dismissing of God, not a forgetting of him, not a taking the place of him, not fearing that God won't do anything in the future and therefore we step in and say no one's going to stand up for me, I will have to take action, but a right trust, reverence, awe of the God of the Bible as he shows himself to be.

[25 : 27] We need a right view, a right fear, a right healthy Christian fear of the Lord. And this right fear needs to change our hearts, Jesus needs to change our hearts at a deep level so we can worship and trust him with a pure heart, seeing right and wrong, not becoming those who dismiss wickedness and say it doesn't matter, you can see clearly, but who respond from a pure heart that's not marked by taking the place of God or being bitter.

How exactly do we do this? And I think the scriptures show us that when we are sinned against, we are supposed to come to our God, our God of justice, and to entrust our justice to him.

Friends, the scriptures show us that our God is indeed a God who believes in justice, is profoundly committed to our justice, and we can entrust the wrongs that are done to us into his hands, and we can trust him.

We serve a God, friends, who mercifully treats you and I far better than, he treats us far better than those we treat who sinned against us.

The scriptures show us just the depth of our own sins against God. God, if we just think this morning about our own anger, we just think about the enormity of that sin against God, and yet, how does God respond and treat us when we sin against him and legitimately grieve him?

[26 : 59] Friends, the Bible tells us that rather than destroying those who've sinned against God, whom he has every right to do, he has every right to do so, rather than dismissing us, saying, I don't have time for you, the scriptures show us in the deep heart of our God, it is a love and a compassion and a care even for those who've wronged him, that sins Jesus, he will leave the comforts of heaven to pursue us, to love us, to take on the consequences of our sin himself in mercy, so that ultimately our hearts can be healed.

Though we had wronged him, how does God deal with us? Does he pout in heaven? Do we see him passive aggressive in the scriptures?

Is that how God responds? No, he pursues us with a soft and a tender heart full of mercy. God, friends, truly treats you and I as his image bearers, as profoundly precious to him, not dismissing us.

And in fact, when there is and was a profound debt to be paid because of the wrong of our sins and what we've done wrong, the Bible says Jesus comes to pay that debt.

And he paid it down to the last penny. He was thrown into the jail of death and hell for us. he didn't get out until he paid the last penny for you and I, the debt of our injustice.

[28 : 41] Friends, you know what this shows us, just as a quick aside, when you and I try to take the place of God and enact justice on other people, we're playing God very badly. We're not even acting like the true God.

We can praise God this morning that he is far, far better than you and I. And the question is, how does the way God treats us then heal our hearts?

Two ways for us to reflect on. Firstly, what Jesus does for us and how God loves his people who have wronged him so deeply. This firstly reconnects our hearts to God so that we now have a relationship with him and can trust our heavenly father to fulfill all justice on our behalf.

What does this look like and what does this mean? Because Jesus has reconciled us to God, our relationship with God is restored. We now love God above everything else.

We don't need to idolize other people and get their approval or something from them, which when we don't get makes us angry because we worship and trust and love and find everything we need from our father above.

[29 : 55] This also means that we are far quicker to see our own sins of anger in reaction to other people's sins. To trust God in those areas. But maybe even more significantly, because of what Jesus has done at the cross, because Christ has come to suffer and die for all of our sins, this in one level elevates God's justice in our view.

God, friends, surely, the scriptures say, will deal with everything that is wrong in this world one day. the cross is not a dismissing of God's justice and God saying justice doesn't matter.

The cross is God saying justice does matter. Everything wrong must be exposed and revealed and dealt with.

And friends, the cross shows us that every wickedness done to you, every bit of evil that you have faced at the hands of other people, will one day certainly be dealt with.

Either those people who have committed sin against you will confess their sins to Jesus and have Jesus carry them at the cross where justice is done and those sins are fully dealt with, or if they refuse to do that, they will have to stand themselves before God one day and give an account for their own sins where justice will be done.

[31 : 20] Friends, the cross is the instrument, the means by which we see God's love, but at the same time, it's the place where we are guaranteed, it underlines the commitment God himself has to justice.

And so when we stare at that, when we look at that this morning, it strengthens our sense that God we serve is a God of justice who will make things right. It's possible those who have sinned against us will be forgiven just as we've been forgiven of our sins.

But if not, it will be done. Justice will be seen one day. And this means, secondly, friends, if you hear this morning struggling with wickedness done to you, you can go to Jesus who has literally himself carried on the cross the weight, the guilt of many wicked peoples, the evil that they've committed.

Jesus understands that. You can go to him today. This trust that we can have now in Jesus, that he will make this right, means you and I this morning can set aside our role of demanding justice on our own terms right here and now.

Now, this is a short sermon. I only have another seven or eight minutes to go. We can't deal with all the nuances and complexities. Sometimes the most loving thing to do for someone is to go to the police and they will need to really pay the consequences.

[32 : 50] That is often the way that you love your neighbor. If someone's committing crimes, it's going to affect other people. You lodge a complaint, you go to the police, and that is one way that justice gets done. I'm speaking here about our own sense of wanting, our own vindication and revenge upon someone where we are taking the place of God in their life.

And only when we trust God as our true judge can we release this bitterness and this anger and entrust it into his hands.

And the cross shows us we can do that knowing it will certainly be dealt with one day. So let me just pause for a moment and just ask this morning, what maybe are some of the seeds of bitterness or maybe indifference or dismissing others that you're watering in your heart this morning?

Friends, every one of us can lay an axe to the root of that bitterness in our hearts this morning. And we do it by laying the axe of the gospel to our hearts.

God's mercy to us, the certainty that God will deal with these things and we entrust our lives and even the grievances we have into his hands knowing that he will do so.

[34 : 13] And we ask him to make us to be like himself. ask his spirit to be at work in us. And secondly, the way the gospel affects and heals our hearts is it reconnects our hearts to God, not just so that we know that justice will one day be done, but it reconnects our hearts to God so that deep in our hearts we begin to feel a sense of mercy toward others just as you and I have received the mercy of Jesus.

Friends, God's mercy toward us, his forgiveness of our sins against him turns our hearts toward God in a deep way which then begins to soften our hearts toward others as well.

We can now see other people's sins without being self-righteous and just judging and dismissing them because we recognize, yep, they may really have sinned, I'm a sinner too in need of God's grace.

And we realize we've received such profound mercy at the hands of God as well. Friends, Jesus helps us see the value of every person, even those who are our enemies which he's going to go on later on in Matthew chapter 5 and speak to us about.

And so when we see Jesus and who he is and what he's done, it both deals with our desire for revenge ourselves and taking the place of God and executing that ourselves, we can entrust that to him and it softens our hearts toward our enemies.

[35 : 46] Now, as I mentioned earlier, there are some crimes or sins that have been committed that really require authorities and others to be involved. And I think the heart of a Christian is that even if you need to do that, and in our church we will definitely counsel people to do so in certain situations, we recognize sometimes people's actions require real justice this side of eternity.

There may need to be police reports, they may need to go to jail for a long time, and a Christian will do so if doing so is truly loving for that person, is truly the best thing for that person and society, but will do so with the heart of such tenderness and compassion that is not gloating or glad or pleased that they'll be destroyed, but if they could, would wish that they could even take their place, if taking their place would truly be in the best interest of that person.

Friends, when this heart starts to get into us, we start to see our hearts now have been shaped by our great and glorious God who has loved us in such a deep and profound way.

So this morning, who is it that you could begin to pray for, maybe begin to show mercy toward as you've received it from Jesus.

And then finally, our last couple of moments, Jesus wonderfully does talk about a horizontal path as well. One of the commentators, Frederick Bruner, speaks of verse 23 to 26, saying these are, once we've dealt with our hearts, the little steps of obedience that you and I can take.

[37 : 26] And let's read verse 23 and 26. He says, so then, if you're offering your gift at the altar and there, remember, your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go. first be reconciled, then come and offer your gift, come to terms quickly with your accuser while you're going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, the judge to the God, and you be put in prison.

And what this, I should have mentioned this a little bit earlier, but one of the reasons we know this is so bad for us spiritually is because anger, Jesus literally says, if this is living inside your heart, it cannot be done while you're worshipping God at the same time.

But Jesus here does give us practical steps to do. And very simply, the two things that he urges us to consider as we want to walk this out with other people is to act proactively and to act quickly.

Now, I am very conscious, this is another disclaimer, again, a tough topic this morning, but another disclaimer. There are many places and churches where some of these commands that Jesus gives have been used to manipulate people, to act in a way that their hearts aren't ready to do, or to maybe even keep people in abusive or wrong relationships.

And that's not Jesus' intention here at all. But I do want us to see the wisdom that Jesus gives here, that when there are relational issues, he's urging us to act both proactively and quickly.

[38 : 53] So, proactively. Verse 23 to 24, if you're offering your gift, then you remember your brother, leave your gift before the altar and go. First be reconciled. Now, what's amazing about this is Jesus is not even talking here about you in this situation necessarily having anger toward another person.

He says if you're worshiping God and you realize there's a conflict between you and someone else and they have something against you, rather seek to repair this before you worship God.

He is urging a proactive initiative toward dealing with any kind of relational breakdowns. fascinatingly, later on in Matthew chapter 18, Jesus says if your brother does sin against you, go to him privately and show him his fault.

In other words, if someone sins against you, or if you just know someone's upset with you, whether or not you think you did anything wrong, Jesus is saying the initiative is always on the Christian to go and try to make those things right.

And I think as we think through these things, as we think through our own hearts, we can respond by asking God to fill us with a sense of mercy to enable us, to proactively reach out to others.

[40 : 03] And then the second thing he says is settle quickly. So he speaks about being proactive, and then he speaks about setting things quickly. In verse 25, he says, come to terms quickly with your accuser while you're going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you to the judge, the judge to the God, and you be put in prison.

And I want to encourage us this morning that there is real wisdom in us following Jesus' advice here to deal quickly with offenses that we have.

I've been married for 22 years. I know that sometimes when you are in an argument or you're in a difficult moment, it can really be wise to just say, let's take an hour and let's just gather our thoughts and think how we can engage in this in a wise way.

That's certainly a moment to kind of cool off, gather your thoughts, pray through things, very, very healthy in relationships. But what can be really unhelpful is when we just put a long distance between people that we are in conflict with.

Jesus is urging us here to deal with these things quickly. And I think the reason for this, as we all know, when you're estranged from someone over a long period of time, and there's a deep sense of anger in your heart, what has to happen over time is, firstly, you don't end up humanizing and personalizing that person anymore.

[41 : 28] And you need to justify that anger. And so what happens with the distance is you act, maybe you're not like me, but I act like a very good defense attorney. And I can think of all the reasons of all the things that they've done wrong, and then I start attributing motives to them.

And instead of humanizing them and standing in their shoes, I just build my case in a stronger and stronger way. And what ends up happening is that rift and that divide just gets larger and larger and larger.

And I've seen some people who refuse to deal with things quickly, and then suddenly it's years and years, and you think this will never, ever be resolved. Jesus is urging us as his people, who see every human being, all human beings as image bearers, to reach out proactively, to try and deal with things quickly, to humanize them, to listen, to see, and ultimately to extend the kind of mercy that God's given to us.

And we can do so knowing that ultimately everything wrong in this world is one day going to be made right. Jesus' death and resurrection confirms that. It shows us God is full of mercy toward us who've sinned against him, but God is so merciful that he will absorb in himself the consequences of our sin to him.

And he is now inviting all of us as his people, to be a people who are not just learning some practical steps about how can we try and serve people better, but who really see and wrestle with our God and his character and the work he's done on the cross in a deep way in our hearts and then slowly learn to live this out.

[43 : 06] I've been a Christian for many, many years. These things take me a long time. They do not come naturally or easily, but this is what it means to be a Christian, to receive God's incredible grace and then ask him to work that out in us slowly.

I've been so encouraged by just meeting so many of you over the last couple of days and over the years that we've known many of you. This, friends, is a church where people, I believe, love each other deeply.

And as you continue to love each other deeply and richly, this is the kind of community God is so eager to add people to where they'll be folded in and together as God's people we learn to live together like him, displaying his character to our watching world.

Can we close our eyes and let me pray for us this morning? Father, we ask you this morning that you would, by your spirit, you would peel away some of the layers of our hearts, maybe where we've justified some of our own responses or anger.

Father, even where those of us have been deeply wounded and hurt in a way that grieves you profoundly. Father, I ask that by your spirit this morning, you, by your mercy, would peel away some of those layers of hardness that have grown in our hearts and you would enable us to bring our wounds, our sufferings, the injustice to you, to entrust it into your hands, to ask you to carry it, and then to ask you to soften our own hearts, to make us more human, to make us more like you.

[44 : 51] Won't you heal us? And as you heal us, Lord God, won't you, I want you to heal our relationships, and won't you heal our world? We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.