

Why Are You Angry?: James 4:1-3
Sunday, April 30th, 2017
By Ryan Perry

Passage: James 4:1-3

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Let's Pray

Introduction:

Let me tell you a story of two men whom we will call Tom and Jim.

Tom has been angry for a long time. Anger is the theme that runs through each of his days, the forge that shapes the situations and relationships of his life. Tom's wife and kids are used to his anger. Tom's kids have learned not to talk with Tom in the morning about money needs, or school problems, or really much of anything.

*Before he hits the parking lot of work he is already complaining to himself about what his day will be like, about all those workers who "don't have a shred of a clue what they are doing." Tom's the boss, but he doesn't feel like the boss. He feels like few people listen to him and no one really respects his authority. Sure, Tom can be friendly, and he doesn't lead like an autocrat. **But when things go wrong, his anger comes quickly.***

*It's not unusual for Tom to return home at the end of the day a bit disgusted—not with his home life, but simply because he has carried the problems of the day into the house with him. Yes, Tom is a hard worker and a good provider. And yes, with his business and four children he has a lot on his plate. And no, Tom isn't abusive or violent. **But Tom is a very angry man and that anger stains everything he touches.***

*Jim is angry too—really angry—but his is not an anger that makes his family walk on eggshells. Jim's anger doesn't make him grumble his way to work. It doesn't make him look down on the people who work for him. It doesn't shape the way he enters the house at the end of his work day. **Yet Jim is certainly an angry man.***

Jim is angry that years of political corruption have left the city, which he lives in and loves, a shell of what it once was. Jim is angry at the poverty and violence that makes neighborhoods not too far from him dangerous and unlivable. Jim is angry that art and culture have been so infected with sex and violence that it is almost impossible to be entertained without having your morals assaulted.

Jim is angry that the church has been either so isolated from the surrounding culture, or in such a war with it, that it has lost its ability to be the salt and light God intends it to be.

But Jim's is not an anger that craves more control. He doesn't pray that things will go his way. Jim usually prays that somehow, some way, he would be part of what God is doing in the place where he has been sent. You see, Jim's anger isn't about Jim at all. Jim's anger is the righteous anger of a man who loves God and whose heart has been caught up in the purposes of God's kingdom. This makes his anger full of compassion, wisdom, justice, kindness, and love. Jim's anger relieves the distress of others, rather than adding to it

Jim's anger doesn't allow him to be self-focused. No, it calls him to be involved in the suffering of others and to look for ways to bless them with what is good.

These stories came from an article by Paul David Tripp entitled **“Good and Angry.”**

And as we ponder these stories we are confronted with two different men who are both angry. As Paul Tripp says, *“Tom is very angry”* and *“Jim is angry, very angry.”* **However, they are men who are facing two radically different types of anger.**

Tom on the one hand is a man who is short-tempered, prideful, irritable, self-focused, and demanding, and it negatively affects everyone around him. Jim, on the other hand, is a man who has been caught up in the purposes of God's kingdom. He hates the sin and corruption that he sees around him and prays that God would use him to relieve the distress of others as he seeks to bring change to his city.

Tom's anger is what we would call **destructive (sinful)**; while Jim's anger is **constructive (righteous)**.

This morning I want to take you on journey through these two types of anger; **destructive (sinful) anger, and constructive (righteous) anger**. I want you to first see that anger is at the heart of who God is and how he acts on our behalf, and if you are a Christian here this morning it is good and right for you to be angry.

Yet, I also want us to see that more often than not, our anger is different from God's anger. It isn't constructive (righteous) and it isn't caught up in the purposes of God's kingdom, but it is destructive (sinful) because our anger originates from the inner motives (passions) of our hearts **that are more focused on our personal earthly kingdoms than on God's kingdom.**

And at the heart of the issue we will find that we all have an **“awe”** problem. We have lost our **“awe of God.”** Therefore, we are no longer driven by our desires for God's kingdom and his purposes, but have exchanged them for our own personal kingdom and our own purposes.

However, before we jump in and look at these different types of anger we first need to define what anger is. David Powlison in his book *Good and Angry* defines anger this way:

Anger is an active stance you take to oppose something that you assess as both important and wrong.

So anger first identifies some perceived wrong. Second, it takes a stance of disapproval and displeasure toward the wrong. And third, it is moved to action: To say or do something about the wrong.

With that definition in mind let's first look at "*Constructive (Righteous) Anger.*" We could also call this "*God's Anger.*"

Constructive (Righteous) Anger:

Now some people might ask, is God really an angry God? And my answer is a strong and resounding "yes."

1 Kings 14:9-10: ...but you have done evil above all who were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back, therefore behold, I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will burn up the house of Jeroboam, as a man burns up dung until it is all gone.

Romans 1:18: For the wrath (anger) of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

God is provoked to anger (active displeasure) by sin, and at times his anger causes him to bring wrath and judgement upon wickedness. And it is good and right for God to do this. He would not be God if he was not angry at wrong doing, and did not punish evil.

But instead of seeing God's anger as destructive, we need to realize that scripture shows us that it is constructive and merciful. It brings good into bad situations. It stands up for the helpless and victimized. It calls out wrongdoers, but holds out the promise of forgiveness, inviting wrongdoers to new life. God's anger is just and brings judgement, but at the same time it is patient and charitable.

Look with me at Exodus 32:11; 13-14. This is right after God told Moses on Mount Sinai that His people had created a golden calf to worship.

11 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you."

13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land

that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’ ” 14 And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

God could have destroyed his people and instead he relents and is merciful, and instead brings a plague upon them for the purposes of bringing them to repentance. **In his mercy God is constructively working for his glory and for the good of his people.**

Or look in the New Testament at Jesus’ calling of Matthew in Matt. 9:9-13.

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Matthew was a bad man and yet instead of receiving wrath he receives mercy from Christ, in fact a whole group of bad people gathered at Matthew’s home and received mercy from Christ.

Does this mean that God is not angry at their sin? No, he is deeply and righteously hot with anger at the sin of Matthew and his fellow tax collectors, in the same way that he is angry at our sin.

But God’s righteous anger leads him to mercy and that anger and wrath is instead poured on Christ and not on Matthew, not on his friends, and not on us.

As 1 John 4:10 says: *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation (wrath bearer) for our sins.*

And it is also this same righteous anger that causes Jim to be angry. To be angry at the corruption in his city and the sexual perversion in his culture, and to be moved by God to want bring about change for the glory of God and the good of his city and the surrounding culture.

This type of anger is constructive and righteous. It is good anger. It is God’s anger.

Destructive (Sinful) Anger:

But there is a problem. For most of us our anger does not fall into this category. Instead it so easily falls into the category of **destructive (sinful) anger**. It is anger that does not work for the constructive good of God’s kingdom and others; rather, it works in a destructive way and hurts people, because it doesn’t get what it wants.

Now you might be thinking, **“Pastor Ryan, that might be something that other people struggle with but I don’t struggle with that.”**

Now, there may be truth to that statement in the sense that you don't struggle with destructive anger as much as someone else does, but it is my contention that we all struggle with it on some level.

Do you ever get irritated with people? Wife, husband, kids, friends, co-workers? Do you ever get in arguments or as the passage in James says "quarrels?" Maybe you have had heated or angry exchanges over things like finances, parenting issues, work projects, politics, maybe even religion.

Have you ever been bitter? Maybe you are recycling old hurts or your nursing grievances that you continue to quietly hold on to and are unwilling to let go of. Have you ever become violent? The full force of your anger is felt in a destructive way for the harm of another person.

Maybe you're someone who is passively angry. You're angry at a person, your life, and your circumstances and instead of manifesting itself in anger maybe it comes out in depression, apathy, or even pessimism.

Lastly, you might struggle with self-righteous anger. Anger that wants to air all your grievances so that everyone knows how right you are, and how wrong those other people are.

Remember Tom. All of these traits belong to him. He is irritated when his kids and wife mess with his schedule, he can burst out in anger and arguments when things go wrong, he is super pessimistic about his work, and the co-workers, "*who don't have a clue what they are doing.*" **He is a bitter man who lives in a pit of self-loathing and self-centeredness.**

And whether he realizes it or not it clearly affects those around him. His wife and kids walk on egg shells and they don't even talk to him at times, and the people that work for him are tense because they are worried that he is going to explode at any moment. **Tom is destructively (sinfully) angry.**

But so are you and so am I.

In fact I look at the things I just mentioned and I have embodied all of them at different times in my marriage and with my kids, and at times even with you, my brothers and sisters in Christ in this room.

I have been irritable with my kids when they won't stop running around the house, or I have at times resentful and bitter toward my wife when she failed to meet my expectations. I have blown up in anger both at my kids and even my brothers in Christ when things don't go my way or someone doesn't do what I think they should be doing.

I have found myself at times depressed, apathetic, and pessimistic about life and ministry, and I have even at times been the self-righteous man who proclaims why he is so right, and everyone else is so wrong.

I am here to confess to you today: **I struggle with destructive anger.** But I am also here to tell you that so do you. **You and I are destructively angry people and we often don't even know it.**

But God understands this about us. He understands it so well that he warns us over and over again about it in scripture.

Look with me at James 1:19-20:

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Ecclesiastes 7:9:

Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.

Ephesians 4:26-27:

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil.

You see you and I are created in the image of a good and angry God. Yet, because of sin in our lives we are so prone to take the righteous and good anger of God and turn it into anger that is bitter, irritated, negative, passive aggressive, pessimistic, violent, and argumentative.

Now you might try to say, *"I get angry and irritates sometimes, and I may get in arguments on occasion, or I can even think of a few times that I have been pessimistic, but that doesn't happen all the time. It's not like I am really an angry person."*

And you will begin to convince yourself that you don't even have a problem. That somehow your anger isn't something that is a part of you, but that it is something that just sort of comes upon you every now and again.

You might even try to convince yourself that your sinful anger is really someone else's fault. It's your husband or wife's fault, your bosses fault because they are too demanding; your kids fault because they won't listen.

But God gives us a different picture in his word. He doesn't let us put our sinful anger on other people; he doesn't let us pass the buck, even though we would like to. Instead he points directly back to our own hearts like a laser and says your anger comes from there, right from your heart.

Look with me in your Bible's at James 4:1-3:

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

So why do we argue, get irritated, bitter, passive aggressive, at times depressed, and apathetic; because we have passions that are at war within us. **You and I have sinful heart desires within us that are at the core of who we are, and they are continually causing us to fight selfishly for what we want. And ultimately, they cause us to lay aside the things of God in pursuit of our own self-gratification.**

So instead of saying thy kingdom come thy will be done, we end up saying my kingdom come and my will be done.

And when we come to a situation where we don't get what our heart desires we become angry, bitter, resentful, etc... and in so doing we either become personally destructive or we become destructive towards other people.

This is the face of destructive (sinful) anger, and at the core of that anger are the selfish self-focused motives that exist at the very center of our hearts.

As Jeremiah writes in Jeremiah 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Solution:

But there is an answer. You see, the realities of our sinful desires and our destructive anger are not meant to drive us to a place of despair as if there is no hope. Because I there is hope, and there is a solution.

And the first step is to realize that you and I are lacking something. We are lacking the essential ingredient for our life and the essential ingredient in seeing change in our anger. You and I are lacking the **“awe of God.”**

You see, our sinful and destructive passions and anger show us that we are more enthralled with, or in awe of our own kingdom than we are with the kingdom of God. We have lost our zeal for God, and have traded the glory of the immortal, perfect, powerful, holy, and all satisfying God, for the glory of a sinful, small, and little people; **ourselves.**

And if you don't think you have an “awe” problem I encourage you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 145 and listen as the psalmist not only praises God, but lays out truth after glorious truth about who God is:

*1 I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.*

*2 Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.*

*3 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.*

*4 One generation shall commend your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.*

*5 On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.*

*6 They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds,
and I will declare your greatness.*

*7 They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.*

*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.*

*14 The LORD upholds all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.*

*15 The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.*

*16 You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of every living thing.*

*17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and kind in all his works.*

*18 The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.*

*19 He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;
he also hears their cry and saves them.*

*20 The LORD preserves all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.*

*21 My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.*

Now let me ask you, a simple question: **When you read this Psalm can you tell me that you whole heartedly believe and live out what the psalmist is saying? If you can't then you have an awe problem.**

And if we are honest, I bet that for many of us the gap between what the psalmist is saying and what we really believe and live is a lot bigger than we would like to admit.

However, if you are willing to come to God, and say “Lord I have lost my awe of you, and I have been living for my own selfish kingdom”, then you can begin the process of regaining your awe, and can experience once again, or maybe for the first time, the daily soul satisfying communion with your God and Savior.

That is our starting point as we seek to turn from our own personal Kingdom to God's kingdom, and as we seek to turn from destructive (sinful) anger to constructive (righteous) anger. We must admit we have an anger problem and we must admit that at the root of that we have an awe problem.

So in your time with the Lord and even within your small groups I encourage to have honest conversations about where you are at with anger and with Jesus. Are you angry? Why are you angry? Have you lost your awe of God, and do you even want it back?

And then next Sunday we will begin to unpack how we can overcome our sinful anger which is about my kingdom and how we can turn it into righteous and constructive anger which is about God's kingdom.

Let's Pray.