

Anger Is a Story
Series on the Book of James
By Dr. Paul Tripp

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Bible Text: James 1:1-27
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I would appreciate your prayers for me over the next few days. I fly early tomorrow morning to Indianapolis, Indiana. Take about an hour trip to Lafayette where Purdue University is. I will be speaking at a conference where there will be about 1700 Christian leaders. It is a wonderful opportunity. And then the week after I will be with Aaron Messner at Covenant College for several days. Wonderful ministry opportunities, but I really do covet your prayers for those trips.

Well, if you had to paint a verbal portrait of the Christian life, what would your verbal portrait look like? If you had to say, "These are the essential elements of the Christian life. This is what walking with life actually looks like," what would you write? How would you describe that? If you had to describe what it means to be a Christian and to follow Jesus to somebody who had never heard that before, had no conception of what that was, what kind of explanation would you make?

That really is what James begins to describe as we look at this passage that we are going to look at this evening. Look with me, if you would, at verse 19 of James one. It is there in your bulletins. This passage is often thought of as a passage about anger and it does say something about anger. But if you look at where this passage sits in the whole discussion of James, we really do have the introduction of something that James follows throughout the rest of his letter. It really is James' attempt under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to paint the kind of portrait that I have just described to you, this portrait of what it looks like to actually live like a believer. What is distinctive about our lives? Is it just that we carry this mysterious theology in our heads? Is it just that we read our Bibles every day hopefully? Is it just that we attend services of worship? What is it about the Christian experience that makes it distinctive and different? If you had to answer that question, what would you say?

Let me read for you, again, these three verses.

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires. Therefore put away all filthiness and

rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.¹

What holds all of those things together—this quick to hear, slow to speak, the word implanted—what is all of that about? Well, there is a phrase in the middle of this passage that is key to unlocking what James is talking about in these verses, but what he is now going to talk about for the rest of his letter. Look at verse 20.

“...for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.”²

There is your description of the Christian experience. God has called you to a new paradigm for living. God has called you to a new principle motivation for the things that you would do and the things that you would say. If I could say this in this crass way, the rules of the game have completely changed.

Now what are the old rules? The old rules are: My life is directed by the purposes of my own kingdom. We have talked about this. What does that mean? My wants, my needs, my feelings. And my life is shaped by what I decide I want for my life, what I decide I want for my relationships, what I decide for how I am going to spend my time, what I decide for how I am going to invest the energies of my life. I am in control of my life. I do what pleases me. And if you don't have a relationship with God, if you don't bring in his being as ultimate, if you don't embrace his grace in your life, if you don't believe in his call, it only makes sense to live selfishly. Why would you not?

What is ultimate is what you want and what you feel and what you need. And James is alerting us to the fact that God has called us now to something that is radically different. And his sort of short hand for that, he has called us to a righteous life. That is the summary of the Christian experience. You have been called now to commit yourself to the plan, to the will, to the purposes of another.

I really do like the way that is unfolded in Matthew six. It is eloquent teaching because it is teaching done by the Lord Jesus Christ in that great Sermon on the Mount that we have looked at together. And in Matthew six Christ contrasts these two ways of living. It is a way of living that is, first, directed by what Christ calls earthbound treasures. I have a set of values of things on this earth that I want to acquire for me. And my heart is controlled by the desire for those treasures and my life is shaped for going at... by going after those treasures. The problem with those treasures is they are all in the process of significant decay. They just fade away. It is the ultimate in poor investments. Thieves steal them. They oxidize. They just get eaten by bugs. They just fade away.

He also adds to that not only earth bound treasures, but anxiety bound needs, that I expend all the energies of my life taking care of what I have determined I need. And so I am running after all those anxious questions of me. Will I have enough to eat? Will I have things to wear? Will I...? And he contrasts that lifestyle of earthbound treasures and

¹ James 1:19-21.

² James 1:20.

anxiety bound needs with this lifestyle of seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness, exactly what James is talking about, because many people think that James was referring to the Sermon on the Mount as he wrote his epistle.

So what is that righteous life that God has called us to? Well, let me put it in these words. It means that now what structures my existence, what motivates me, what shapes my decisions and my plans—get this—is that I want my life in every place and in every way to please my Savior. I want to be part of his purpose. I want to be part of his plan. Greater than “Does it bring me joy?” is the question: Does it bring him pleasure? Does it bring him joy? Is he pleased by the way that I live and I speak and I invest and I spend my time and my energy and my money and I conduct my relationships? I am giving myself to the righteous life that the calls me to. That is the paradigm.

Listen. You are not just in a holding pattern waiting for eternity. This life has meaning and purpose. There is a kingdom that you have been called to be part of. It is called the kingdom of God. And God wants you to invest in his kingdom. Your life doesn't belong to you anymore. You have been purchased by another.

Now James gets amazingly practical in terms of what that looks like. I think more practical than we often get. I think that sometimes our Christianity is way too lofty to be actually practical. You could say amen to that, but you are afraid to, because you don't know what is coming next. And so James goes, as James is so willing to do and it is why I think this is such an important portion of Scripture for us, he goes right down to the very, very mundane levels of every day life.

Now let me remind you again. That is where you live. You don't live in these big, grand, dramatic moments. Some of us like drama, but we don't live there. You live in the little moments of every day life. You live in little conversations. You live in little decisions. You live—sorry, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you live a rather mundane life. Most of our lives would not make very compelling reality television. Our reality isn't very entertaining. And in those little moments you are meant to live with zeal for the righteous life that God has called you to. Those little moments don't belong to you. Those moments belong to your King. The rules of the game have changed. The paradigm has changed.

And so James wants us to understand how utterly mundane that actually gets. Look at the first thing he says. I don't think this would have been the first thing that I would have used as a descriptor.

“...be quick to hear.”³

Could he have said something more important than that? But I want to give you a principle here. Are you ready for this? Your ears listen for what your heart prays. Your ears happen to listen for what your heart craves.

³ James 1:19.

You know why I struggle to be a good listener? Because I am so filled with zeal for my own kingdom. And I am full of my own thoughts. I am full of my own purposes. I am full of my own plans. I am a man with a constant agenda. I have more opinions than a man should ever have. And there are times when I am very aware—and this is embarrassing to admit—but how can I not? Where I am barely able to tolerate that person finishing their sentence before I am able to say the wise thing that everybody would want to hear. And there are times when conversing with me is like a pinball machine. There is not a whole lot of order to the conversation because I am not actually listening to you. I am just thinking of the thing that I want to say next because I like to hear me. I actually like to hear me more than I like to hear you. How embarrassing. How—can I say this—ungodly. Because, you see, that is all about my joy. It is all about my kingdom. It is all about the grandeur of me. And I have been called to the grandeur of another. And to hear this that means that the kingdom of God in distinctive and fundamental ways is others centered. Why do I know listen to you? Because my life belongs to another and I want to develop meaning relationships with you. I want to hear your story. I want to be part of what is going on in your life, not just because I want a relationship with you, but because I would love to be part of something good in your life that pleases the king of us both.

Now listen. Listening takes sacrifice. Listening takes humility. Hear this. Listening takes the rescue of your heart from you. It is not a little thing, although it appears that at the surface.

What is the second thing? Be slow to speak. Wow, again, it is very easy to have a hair trigger tongue ready to advance your thoughts, ready to advance your opinions. You know, you are listening to the stories of others and you are... you are carrying in you mind the trump story, the story that would be better than the stories that have just been heard. And you can't wait to speak your story.

What does it mean to be slow to speak? Here it is. Paul captures this for us very well in 2 Corinthians five. His way of capturing what God has called us to is this wonderfully descriptive word. Here it is. The word is ambassadors. You see, what I have been called to is a representative way of living. I don't represent me. I represent a King who has placed me where I am. And so everything I do and everything I say should be in some way representing him, his will, his plan, his message, his purpose, his character, his grace. And so why am I slow to speak? Because I want to make sure that the words that I speak into you life will represent well the king that I represent. I am not speaking to win you for me. I am not speaking so you will walk away and say, "Boy, Paul Tripp is a great guy. Boy, he is smart." I am speaking for the King. And I take seriously that by a amazing grace that I don't understand I have been chosen to be an ambassador of the Lord who rules it all. And I have been chosen to be placed in relationships where I actually have an opportunity to represent him in the lives of others. What a high calling. What are reason for breathing.

But James goes on. He says:

“...slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.”⁴

Manish anger is in the way of that righteousness. Think about this. Be willing to open your heart this evening and take a humble look. Would you not agree with me that the vast amount of your anger has nothing to do with the kingdom of God? You are not typically angry at the violations of God’s law. You are typically angry at the violations of the laws of your kingdom.

Parents, why do you grow impatient with your children? Because in your kingdom your children would need your correction much less than they actually do. Husbands and wives, why do you get angry with your husband or wife? Because somehow, some way they are in the way of your personal dream for your life. And you quit looking at that person as an object of your affection. You begin to look at that person as an obstacle in the way of what you want.

I have mentioned this to you before. Why do you get angry in traffic? Because in your kingdom you would drive on road paid for by other citizens who choose not to use them. You see, anger really does embarrassingly expose the fact that although we claim allegiance to the kingdom of God, we have deep allegiance to our own kingdom. And there is barely a day that I go through that I am not angry or irritated or impatient with somebody because although I want to say I love God, I want to say I serve his righteous purpose, I want what I want. I don’t like the obstacles that are in the way of what I want.

You see, James is saying that goes in the exact opposite direction of the righteous kingdom of God.

Now here is what you need to understand is there is a way in which all of Scripture is one big anger story. It is the holy righteous anger of God who has a zeal for his cause and is angry with anything that is in his way. And his anger is the hope of the universe because that anger is just and holy and merciful and right. And there is the anger of man, the unholy anger of man and we want our selfish way and we are angry when anything is in our way and that anger is our doom. And you see these two angers course their way through Scripture and you know they can’t coexist. You know they go in different directions and you know some moment those two angers are going to collide. It is going to be an explosion. There is going to be a whole lot of carnage. And those angers do actually collide in this horrible moment and glorious moment at the same time. Those angers collide on the cross of Jesus Christ, because the anger of God takes Jesus to the cross and the anger of man takes Jesus to the cross. And Jesus bears the full anger of God and the full anger of people so that—hear this—so that not that we would be free from anger, but that we could actually become people like Christ—are you listening to me—who are good and angry at the same time.

Because listen, brothers and sisters, as long as we live in this fallen world where horrible things take place, where there is injustice and violence and cruel treatment and deceit and

⁴ James 1:19-20.

brokenness, we should not be passive. It should not be ok for us. We should be righteously angry. But it is not the vile angry of human selfishness. It is the anger of mercy and the anger of justice and the anger of compassion and the anger of sympathy and the anger of ministry. It is an anger that is holy and pure. It is ambassadorial anger.

And there should be a way that there should never be a day when you are free of that kind of anger, because you are angry at what sin has done to this world and you want to see justice and righteousness and peace and mercy reign.

But James says one further thing. Verse 21.

“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”⁵

He ends this way. What is that righteous life about? It means I am going to be quick to hear. Because I live an other centered life, I want to know you and I want to be part of what God is doing in your life. It means a slowness to speak because I receive my ambassadorial calling and I want to speak for the King. I am amazed that I would have the opportunity to represent the King of kings and the Lord of lords. I want to examine my anger. Is it the unholy anger of a selfish kingdom? Or is it the righteous anger of the kingdom of God? But this last thing. I want to be serious and seriously in pursuit of this righteous and holy life that God has called me to. It means two things here. First of all, I want to be serious about sin. I am not willing to let sin have place in my life. I am not going to give my thoughts and my actions and my words to things that my Lord would name as filthy. I want to confess again and again to him that I look at filthy things and I don't see them as filthy as they are. And I want to see those things as ugly as they are in his sight so that my heart would be repulsed by them. My heart is not always repulsed.

And then along with that, I want to grab a hold of the amazement that my heart has become open to God's truth. It has been opened to the Word of his truth. So many people have no knowledge of truth. So many people are lost in the deceit of 1000 views of life that are not true in any way, shape or form. And by the mystery of God's grace the glorious mysteries of the universe have been opened to me. What an amazing thing. And I understand things that are now and eternally true. What an amazing thing. And I want to pursue a deeper knowledge and a deeper understanding of those things. I want to know what God has said to me and all of its implications for my every day living. And I understand that that word, as I pursue it, has the great power to save my soul. That word has tremendous power to rescue me from me.

What is that righteous life? It is exiting the plans and purposes of the kingdom of your wants and needs and feelings. And receiving the call to the kingdom of righteousness, understanding that you are owned now by another, quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry, repulsed by the filthiness of sin, excited about the truths of God's Word.

⁵ James 1:21.

And I want to say this to you this evening. Please, please hear me. There is no way that you are going to pull that off. This call is plainly and simply to hot for everyone in this room. And so what this call should do is drive you in humble consciousness of who you are to your knees for God's help to say, once again, "Father, I get it so wrong. I so often confuse my kingdom with yours. I so often am so taken by my own story, my own plans and my own opinion, I make a bad ambassador. There are times when I look at sin and I don't see something filthy. I see something attractive. There are times when I go through days irritated because I am not getting my way. And I would pray once more. Won't you show me with your voice so that in some small way where I live with those who I live near that I would live in little moments for your kingdom and your righteousness, that I would find joy in the righteous life that you have called me to.

Oh, I would encourage you. Be humble. Admit your need. Seek the forgiving and enabling grace of your Lord.

Let's pray.

Thank you, Lord, for the challenging and comforting and practical words of James. Thank you that they speak to right where we live. And we would seek again your help. Oh, our zeal for our own little kingdoms is not dead. We pray that you will once more rescue us from us for the sake of your kingdom and for the honor of your glory we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.