

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Can Christians Get Angry at Sin and Death?*."

Pastor Nathan preached for me the last two weeks which I really appreciated, so that I could be with my mom and kids, and plan Dad's Celebration of Life.

But even though I didn't have a sermon to prepare, I worked on this message.

I wanted to preach this, versus jump right back into our vision sermons, because of all the people in our church family who have lost loved ones recently.

For example:

- The Raleys lost their son
- Robby Lehtonen and Mike Houck each lost a brother
- The Schmitz's – Allan, Kandie, and Malyna – lost a cousin and nephew
- Allan Schmitz lost his father
- Audrey Templin lost a sister, and her children lost an aunt
- Richard and Betty Pender lost a son
- Wendy McFarlane lost a brother
- Kelli Motzkus lost her father
- Bonnie Ailshie lost a grandfather
- Edie Cole lost a daughter
- Pastor Nathan's uncle is on hospice and wasn't expected to live through yesterday
- Four families have experienced miscarriages

And even if we haven't lost people recently, most of us have lost people in the past, and we will lose more people in the future.

And this is because death is so...normal.

Now my suspicion is when I just said that – that death is normal – you probably cringed a little and disagreed with my use of that word.

And why is that?

Because death doesn't feel normal. It feels completely abnormal.

But I looked up the definition of the word normal, and it said, "usual, common," which means if death is something all of us experience then it is actually one of the most normal things in existence.

But again, it doesn't feel that way, does it?

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Over the last two weeks I was wrestling with my feelings regarding my dad's passing and I tried to evaluate them biblically. By that, I simply mean I tried to figure out whether my feelings were good or bad, right or wrong...which is what led to this sermon.

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Let me share something that probably won't sound like it has that much to do with the sermon, but if you bear with me hopefully my point will become clear...

I've been pastoring this church for 10 ½ years and:

- I have always felt like I can be myself.
- I have always felt like I can be transparent...to a point. Obviously, there are times we shouldn't be transparent.

- I have never felt like I had to be someone that I'm not, including when my dad passed away.
- I have never felt like I had to live up to any standard, except the standard for elders in God's Word, which is a standard I should be expected to live up to.

But with that said, I think most of the time, it's fairly easy for pastors like me in the United States to look spiritual and mature. What I mean by that is, maybe we will be persecuted in the future, but I don't think we are being persecuted now. We can stand up and boldly preach God's Word without having to worry about being beaten or arrested. Again, maybe that will change, but we're not there yet.

So as pastors when do we have a real opportunity – for lack of a better way to say it – to look spiritual and mature?

When we suffer. When we go through trials. That's when we can give glory to God by bearing up well underneath whatever we're experiencing.

Or to put it simply, we have the greatest opportunity to reveal Christ, and what He's done in our lives, when we are suffering.

What pastor – or really any Christian for that matter – can't look good or praise God when things are going well?

But show me the person who just lost a loved one, or who just got the cancer diagnosis and still praises God.

Then you get to see a person who has a deep relationship with Christ and is being held up by His grace.

So while I have never felt pressure to act a certain way as your pastor, when Dad passed away I did feel like God gave me an opportunity to represent Him well to all of you.

And I wanted to do so!

So that meant evaluating my feelings and considering whether they were godly or ungodly.

And this brings us to lesson one...

**Lesson one: we should evaluate our feelings.**

We should evaluate our feelings to determine whether they please or displease God.

And how are we going to do this?

- We look to God's Word to see what it says about the feelings we are experiencing
- I would also say we look at our premier example, Jesus Christ Himself, to see if He experienced those same feelings because He was the perfect Person.

So regarding my feelings...

As you would probably expect, I have experienced grief.

And we can grieve when we lose loved ones...

**1 Thessalonians 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.**

So Paul says to grieve, but just not as those **without hope**...and why's that?

Who grieves without hope?

Unbelievers!

Paul used the same language to describe unbelievers elsewhere...

**Ephesians 2:12 You were separated from Christ...HAVING NO HOPE AND WITHOUT GOD in the world.**

So when Paul says not to grieve without hope, he's saying not to grieve like unbelievers.

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As believers we should approach many things differently than unbelievers do...especially death.

This life is all they know. When they lose a loved one they'll never see them again. There is no hope for them.

But as believers, we can grieve with hope.

With Dad, we were confident in his salvation and we can look forward to seeing him again. And this gives us hope.

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A close second to grief I would say I also felt sorrowful.

I was – and still am – very sorrowful that I will not see Dad again on this side of heaven.

The word that keeps coming to mind is, “Final.” Death feels so final. It is hard to believe that Dad is gone. And it fills me with sorrow.

Joy is one of the fruit of the spirit, which might cause us to think we should always be joyful and never sorrowful.

So is it okay to be sorrowful?

**Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn.**

And Jesus Himself was sorrowful...

**Matthew 26:36 Jesus went...to a place called Gethsemane...37 And...HE BEGAN TO BE SORROWFUL and troubled. 38 Then he said to [the disciples], “MY SOUL IS VERY SORROWFUL, even to death.”**

That is sorrowful! Jesus was so sorrowful He said it almost killed Him.

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Because Dad had Alzheimer's and we knew it was only going to get worse we had years to think about him passing away and what it would be like.

There were many times I thought about how I would feel. I would even ask Katie how she thought I would feel.

I expected grief and sorrow.

But I also experienced one feeling, which I didn't expect, and that was anger:

- I felt angry at Dad dying
- I felt angry at Death

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And the difficulty with evaluating anger is it isn't as straightforward as other feelings, because some verses discourage anger and others encourage it.

For example...

**Proverbs 22:24 make no friendship with a man given to anger.**

This makes anger look pretty bad. We're not even supposed to be friends with angry people.

**Ecclesiastes 7:9 anger lodges in the heart of fools.**

This makes anger look bad too. Fools have anger living in their hearts.

**Colossians 3:8 put away all anger.**

Anger is something that's supposed to be put away from us.

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But we know not all anger is bad, because God gets angry...

**Deuteronomy 9:8 [Moses told the Israelites], "THE LORD WAS SO ANGRY with you that he was ready to destroy you."**

That's pretty angry!

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When the Israelites complained in the wilderness...

**Numbers 11:1 The people complained...and when the Lord heard it, HIS ANGER WAS KINDLED, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp.**

God was so angry that it sounds like his anger became fire that flashed out and burned some of the camp.

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What about Jesus during His earthly ministry? In other words, did we ever see God become angry when He became a Man?

Twice Jesus cleansed the temple. He drove out the people who were buying and selling, he overturned the money changers' tables, and he made a whip to chase out everyone. We assume he was angry, and it sounds like he was, but it must be inferred because it doesn't say so.

But there is one time that we are told that Jesus was angry, and it might surprise you...

He was in the synagogue with the man with a withered hand. The religious leaders were watching Him to see if He would heal. They hoped He would so they could accuse him of working on the Sabbath...

**Mark 3:5 [Jesus] looked around at them WITH ANGER, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.**

So Jesus got angry at the religious leaders' lack of concern for this man.

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You might listen to this and say...

*"Well, this is God getting angry. That doesn't mean we should get angry. James 1:20 says the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."*

True, but listen to these verses...

- **Psalm 97:10 O you who love the Lord, HATE EVIL!**

- **Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the Lord is HATRED OF EVIL.**
- **Amos 5:15 HATE EVIL, and love good**
- **Romans 12:9 Let love be genuine. ABHOR (OR HATE) WHAT IS EVIL; hold fast to what is good.**

These verses tell us to hate, or be angry at, evil.

And this reveals the balance that brings us to lesson two...

### Lesson two: we can be angry at (part one) sin.

When I was going over the sermon with Katie she said, “especially our own sin.”

Here’s what we should ask ourselves to determine whether our anger is good or bad:

- Are we angry at sin, wickedness, and evil...the things God gets angry at?
- Or are we:
  - Angry at not getting our way?
  - Angry at people not giving us what we want?

**James 4:1 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.**

These verses describe the problems that are caused by our anger at not getting what we want.

So anger that is a result of our selfishness, is definitely bad anger.

But this still doesn’t resolve the question that I was facing over the last two weeks, which is...

Was it okay for me to be angry at Dad’s death?

Let me show you an account that I think reveals that it was okay, and hopefully will allow you to feel comfortable being angry at Death too. Turn to **John 11**.

This is the familiar account of the death of Mary and Martha’s brother, Lazarus. Let’s pick up at **verse 31...**

**John 11:31 When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.**

We talked about grief and sorrow being acceptable feelings when people die, and we see Mary experiencing those same feelings:

- **Verse 31** says people are **consoling her**.
- **Verse 33** says she’s **weeping**.

What I would like you to notice is the end of **verse 33** says **he was deeply moved in his spirit**.

The Greek word for **deeply moved** means, “Be indignant, angered.”

If you’re using the ESV you probably notice there is a footnote following the word **moved**, that says it could be translated as, “**Or was indignant,**” which means angry.

And this brings us to the next part of lesson two...

### Lesson two: we can be angry at (part two) Death.

We should evaluate our feelings, and when we see our Lord get angry at Death, it convinces me we can be angry at Death too...especially because it's a consequence of sin.

Here are just a few quotes from commentaries, although I could give you many more...

John MacArthur said...

*“The phrase here does not mean merely that Jesus was deeply touched or moved with sympathy at the sight. The Greek term [for deeply moved] always suggests anger, outrage, or emotional indignation.”*

D.A. Carson is a well-respected Bible scholar. He has a commentary on the Gospel of John that is almost 700 pages long. He wrote...

*“The Greek word [for deeply moved] suggests anger, outrage or emotional indignation.”*

In other words, this isn't Jesus simply being sad. This is Him being angry.<sup>1</sup>

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Something I would like us to consider – that was a great encouragement to me and I hope encourages you as well – is *WHY* was Jesus angry at Death.

Why do you think?

Because of the grief and sorrow Death causes humanity.

Listen to the way it's worded in the Amplified...

**John 11:33 When Jesus saw her sobbing, and the Jews who had come with her also sobbing, He was deeply moved in spirit [TO THE POINT OF ANGER AT THE SORROW CAUSED BY DEATH] and was troubled.**

DA Carson said...

*“Jesus is moved by their grief, and is consequently angry with the sin, sickness and death in this fallen world that WREAKS SO MUCH HAVOC AND GENERATES SO MUCH SORROW.”*

A.W. Pink said...

*“The Greek word for [deeply moved] expresses deep feeling, sometimes of sorrow, more often of indignation. In this instance the Holy Spirit has recorded the cause of Christ groaning – it was the sight of Mary and her comforters weeping. He was here in the midst of a groaning creation, which sighed and travailed over that which sin had brought in. And this He felt acutely. The original [language] suggests that He was distressed to the extremist degree: moved to a holy indignation and sorrow at the terrific brood which sin had borne. Agitated by a righteous [hatred] of what evil had wrought in the world.”*

Jesus sees what Death does to people He loves and it caused Him to be angry at it.

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I would say it like this...

I hate Death:

- I hate it for taking our friends and loved ones from us
- I hate it for causing so much pain and heartbreak
- I hate it for ending lives when it seems like there should be years left

And I'm glad Jesus hates it too.

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And this is also why He weeps. Look at **verse 34**...

**John 11:34 And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept.**

This is a beautiful window into Jesus's humanity. He experienced the full spectrum of human emotions, and I want you to appreciate what this reveals about Jesus, when we lose people we love.

Consider this verse...

**Hebrews 1:3 [Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and THE EXACT IMPRINT OF HIS NATURE.**

What does it mean that Jesus is the **exact imprint** – or **express nature** or **exact representation** as it's translated in other Bibles – of God's nature?

Simply put, it means when we see Jesus, we are seeing God the Father. We see God the Father through God the Son because Jesus is God.

This is why in **John 14:9 Jesus said, "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father."**

So when we see Jesus weep here, and we consider that we see God through Him, we understand that:

- God feels.
- He loves
- He experiences compassion
- He's moved by the pain and suffering of His people

God is not some apathetic, passionless, unemotional, detached deity who looks at His creation without feeling. The truth is that God feels for us deeply.

Listen to how Warren Wiersbe explains it...

*"Our Lord's weeping reveals the humanity of the Savior. He has entered into all of our experiences and knows how we feel. In fact, being the perfect God-Man, Jesus experienced these things in a deeper way than we do. His tears also assure us of his sympathy; he is indeed 'a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief' (Isaiah 53:3). Today, he is our merciful and faithful High Priest, and we may come to the throne of grace and find all the gracious help that we need (Hebrews 4:14-16)."*

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Look at **verse 38**...

**John 11:38 Then Jesus, DEEPLY MOVED AGAIN, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.**

This is the same Greek term from earlier showing Jesus's anger.

He is angry again, and now He is about to do something about it. Let me help you look at what is about to happen by inviting you to think about one of the things you're forced to put up with having me as your pastor...

You know that whenever I'm studying a passage, it tends to become my favorite, right?

Well, if you asked me before about my favorite showdowns in Scripture, here's what I would have said, in order:

- My third favorite showdown is Elijah on Mount Carmel against the prophets of Baal
- My second favorite showdown is David against Goliath
- My first favorite showdown is Jesus against the devil in the wilderness

But after reflecting on this account the last two weeks it has become my new favorite showdown...

Jesus is angry at Death, and He takes it on.

Look at **verse 43** to see how easily He defeats it...

**John 11:43** When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." **44** The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

And that's it. With three words He defeated death.

When I was going over the sermon with Katie, she said, "*It wasn't much of a showdown.*"

It was that easy for him.

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There are a few places in Scripture, such as **1 Corinthians 15** and **Revelation 20** that capitalize Death, because it's being personified. It's presented as an enemy of ours that needs to be defeated.

**Revelation 20:14** Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

This describes Death going to hell.

God wants us so confident in Christ's victory over Death, that the Bible describes Death itself going to hell.

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Why did Jesus let Lazarus die?

He clearly didn't want him dead, because he raised him within a few days.

But that's why he let him die: so he could raise him and show his victory over Death.

Look back at **verse 14**...

**John 11:14** Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, **15** and **FOR YOUR SAKE I AM GLAD THAT I WAS NOT THERE, SO THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE. But let us go to him.**"

Jesus let Lazarus die, because he wanted Mary, Martha, and all the others present to believe that he could defeat Death.

But it's recorded for us in John's Gospel so that – as the end of the gospel says in **John 17:21** – we may also believe.

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And because this account is as much for us as it was for Mary, Martha, and the others in Jesus' day, I would like to personalize it.

Look at **verse 23**...



**John 11:23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”**

What could Jesus say to me?

**Your father will rise again.**

If you lost a child through a miscarriage or you lost a believing loved one, what could Jesus say to you?

**Your**

- **Father**
- **Son**
- **Brother**
- **Sister**
- **Cousin**
- **Nephew**
- **Grandfather**

**will rise again.**

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Now hopefully, you notice I said, “**BELIEVING** loved one.”

Resurrection unto eternal life is only available for those who have repented of their sins and believe in Jesus. Look at **verse 25...**

**John 11:25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and BELIEVES IN ME shall never die. Do you believe this?”**

I could ask you the same thing: do you believe this?

If you do, then Jesus – the resurrection and the life – will resurrect you and give you eternal life.

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Let me conclude by saying this...

Death is very difficult and painful. There is a finality to it that makes it unlike anything else we experience.

When someone passes away it doesn't feel like they're gone, at least at first. It takes time to adjust to the new normal and accept what has occurred. It is almost as though we live in a sort of denial, unable to believe that we won't see them again.

But if we are believers we can have great hope in the midst of our grief. For believers every other believers' death can serve as a reminder of Christ's work and His victory over this enemy we face.

Let's pray.

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<sup>i</sup> Let me show you something interesting. Turn two chapters to the right to **John 13:21**.

**John 13:21 After saying these things, Jesus was TROUBLED IN HIS SPIRIT, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”**

This is the same Greek term from **John 11:33**. So here's the point...

Jesus was as angry at Death as He was at one of His disciples betraying him.