other through potentially crippling spiritual issues or do we arrogantly say with Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper (Genesis 4:9)?” Jesus provides the second example in verses 25-26.

Settling Matters (vv 25-26)

Jesus says, “”Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. "I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.” The second example of dealing with anger takes place not with a brother, but an enemy. While the example is different, the point remains the same. It is always better, even when dealing with an enemy, to take quick and decisive action to alleviate the devastating effects of anger in a relationship. Allowing anger to build up and then explode out does not serve anyone at all.

So the question is not only how we deal with our own anger or the anger a brother or sister in Christ might have toward us, but how we deal with the anger unbelievers have with us. Again, do we have a humble spirit and a desire to make peace that enables us to deal even with the anger of an enemy in a way that leads to peace? Do we care about the anger others have? Do we care about the effects of that anger on them, let alone on us?

Imagine what it would look like for followers of Jesus to live out what he says about anger. Imagine what it would look like for us to deal with the anger in our own hearts by mourning the spiritual poverty that gave rise to it. Imagine what it would look like if we cared so much about our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ that we did everything we could to help them deal with their anger. Imagine if we stopped using anger and outrage as our only tool in talking to people about the issues we hold dear and think God holds dear. That is the kind of thing that could change the world.

Here’s how we can apply this truth. One, if the Holy Spirit is convicting you about anger, then ask God to help you mourn that spiritual poverty. If you use anger as a weapon, ask God to help you mourn that spiritual poverty. If you become so angry with certain people, or certain types of people, that if you were honest you would say your anger is murderous, ask God to help you mourn that spiritual poverty. That is the only thing that will change it.

Two, if the Holy Spirit is convicting you about people who are angry with you and you have not tried to make peace, then ask God to help you do whatever can be done to make peace as soon as possible. And don’t wait. Drop what you’re doing and go deal with it. Earnestly ask the Lord to help you and to help the person you’re talking to.

Conclusion

As I have thought about this, it strikes me that we live in a very angry world. People thrive on taking offense and responding in anger. They thrive on the adrenaline rush of venting their anger. Because they feel justified in their anger, they are unaware of the effects their anger has on their own soul and unconcerned about the effects of anger on the souls of their fellow human beings who have been created in God’s image. They actually watch and listen to the things that will make them the most angry, which our media is happy to provide them.
**Introduction**

Good morning! It’s great to see all of you here this morning. This is the sixth message in our series working our way through the Sermon on the Mount. If you’ve missed any of those messages, you can listen, watch, or read them on our website at wcag.org/sERMONs. Today we’re going to look at Matthew 5:21-26 and what Jesus has to say about anger, murder, and reconciliation.

21 You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’

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

Verses 21 begins a series of six antitheses, as they are often called, or statements such as “you heard it said… but I say to you.” When Jesus talks about the people long ago, it’s most likely he’s talking about those to whom the law of Moses was originally given, that is, the Israelites. Jesus quotes the sixth commandment forbidding murder word for word from the Greek version of the Old Testament (Exodus 20:15, Deuteronomy 5:18). The command forbidding murder is probably the single most important law of any healthy society. You simply cannot have an orderly society unless you value human life.

Jesus doesn’t take issue with the sixth commandment. He simply makes the point that you can refrain from murdering someone and still stand under God’s judgment because of murderous anger in your heart and the words that anger sometimes gives rise to. So, to go back to what Jesus said before, the Pharisees and teachers of the law practiced a righteousness that allowed for anything but homicide. They could scorn and revile and hate another person and still feel perfectly righteous.

By contrast, Jesus says if your righteousness does not go beyond refraining from homicide to include the thoughts and attitudes of your heart, then you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. To go back to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:21, if we clean the inside of the cup—our heart—then the outside of the cup will be clean as well—refraining from homicide. However, it is completely possible to keep the outside of the cup clean by refraining from homicide and yet be filled with all kinds of wickedness.

If you think about it, we expect that those who murder will be subject to judgment, both human and divine. However, Jesus says, we will stand under God’s judgment even for the thoughts and attitudes we entertain, as well as the words that we use. Here’s the problem: we can all to some degree control whether we murder another person or say murderous things to them. However, our thoughts and attitudes are a different story. And that’s why the answer to the problem of murder and murderous thoughts and murderous words is not trying harder, but mourning our spiritual poverty. When the Holy Spirit points out the hatred we have for another person, our response should be to mourn our spiritual poverty—to embrace godly sorrow—and in so doing to allow God to change our heart and mind so that they produce different fruit.

We often then trip on some other Scriptures. Jesus himself seems to be angry when he made a whip out of cords, overturned the tables of the money changers, scattered their money, and chased them away (John 2:13ff). In Ephesians 4:26, Paul says, “Be angry and do not sin.” For those reasons, we then try to distinguish between the murderous anger Jesus forbids and what is sometimes called righteous indignation. Righteous indignation, or righteous anger, Martin Luther says, is the “anger of love.” It’s an anger that does not wish another person ill, but which is aroused because of love and wickedness. If you want to know which you have, I challenge you to pray for the person who is the vehicle of your anger. Can you pray that God will bless them and reveal himself to them and in so doing to allow God to change your heart and mind so that they produce different fruit?

Reconciliation (vv 23-24)

Jesus says, “23Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” In Jesus’ day, the temple was open and people worshiped at the temple, bringing gifts to it as an act of worship. Jesus says that if you’re in the act of worship and remember that a brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift, go make things right, and then come back. What’s so significant about this example?

One, Jesus makes it clear that anger is such a potentially serious problem that it deserves immediate action, even if it temporarily pulls us out of Sunday worship service. Anger is not to be trifled with because if we don’t deal with it, it can lead to our judgment before God. Two, Jesus makes it clear that anger deserves immediate action even if it’s a brother or sister who is angry with us. We can’t help but wonder why someone else’s anger is my problem. The answer is that if we truly love our brothers and sisters, we will want to do everything we can keep them from being ensnared by sin. By helping each other to deal with potential sin in our lives, we help each other turn from the error of our ways, save us from death, and cover over a multitude of sins (James 5:20).

So the question is not simply whether we ourselves are dealing with our anger, but whether we are helping our brothers and sisters to deal with their anger when we’re the source of it. Do we have a humble enough spirit and a desire to make peace to the extent that we would walk with each