

Even Jesus got angry sometimes.

Most of us would admit that we get angry more than we should. And we know from too much experience that our anger never makes anything better. It is a destructive force within us that seems to make us strong at the time. The pieces left after our anger subsides make our list of regrets longer by the year.

But if you look around at the world today, people seem to think that getting angry is the way to improve the world. It's all about "protesting" now, making others hear your voice even if you have to demolish some storefronts to get their attention. As a society, we still know that anger is destructive. We just think that destruction is an effective way to get things to change the way we want them to.

Even though you and I do not let our anger move us to actually destroy things, we have a sense that it would be possible if something made us mad enough. The point is, the anger of our time is a very human thing. Something we all experience often, even if we don't let it carry us away to extreme behaviors.

That's why it's no small surprise to see how angry Jesus gets when a man with leprosy asks to be healed. It's in

Mark 1:40-45. There Mark shows us a Jesus who is aggravated about something. This situation provokes Jesus' spirit so that he can barely control himself.

As we said, we can all relate to that feeling. So, let's take a closer look at what happens in this story. Let's watch our Lord, Jesus, deal with an upsetting situation. We'll try to learn a few things from his example about how we can respond to our own anger *without* destroying things and piling up regrets.

What Made Jesus Mad

There are three key words in Mark's story that clue us into Jesus' angry emotional state in this encounter with the leper. It will be helpful to read the story before discussing them. They are in bold type in the following quote:

And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." ⁴¹

Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. ⁴³ And He **sternly warned** him and immediately **sent him away**, ⁴⁴ and He said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." ⁴⁵ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere. (Mark 1:40-45 NASB)

1. Destructive Pestilence

First, Jesus' compassionate act in this case was actually motivated by his anger about something. There is important evidence that makes it very likely that Mark wrote that Jesus was "moved with anger" rather than compassion. It is true that Jesus' healing of the man was a compassionate thing to do. And compassion for the man's suffering is certainly in the mix of things going on in Jesus'



heart here. However, very early copies of this text, and the two other undisputed indications of Jesus' anger in this context, call us to see that something about this man's leprosy made Jesus angry.

What would have made Jesus mad about a leper asking for healing? The major clue from Mark's story is the fact that healing is not what the man asks for, and it is not healing that Jesus grants.

Look at the text again. Notice that the man says to Jesus, "If you are willing, you can make me *clean*." When Jesus grants his request, Jesus says, "You are *cleansed*."

Though the man gets healed of his leprosy, the problem of leprosy here is not mainly that it is a terrible, destructive disease. It is a disease that makes a person "unclean."

To us, disease and being unclean only means that we need

to wash our hands for twenty seconds with warm soapy water. But washing his hands would have done nothing for this man's leprosy, and it would have done nothing to stop him from being "unclean."

According to the religious law God gave the Jewish people through Moses, anytime someone is found to have an active case of leprosy, the priest was required to declare them "unclean." (See Leviticus 13:2, 45-46; 14:3, 20) That meant that the person had to go into quarantine outside the community until their symptoms stopped. Once their symptoms went away, then they were to go back to the priest, who would verify things and declare them "clean" again. Now they could resume their normal lives. But they might still have whatever caused the leprosy to begin with. Anytime their symptoms came back, they had to go through this all over again.

We know how awful that can be. To have to stay away from the places we normally go, the work we normally do, the people we normally associate with. The COVID-19 stay-at-home rules have shown all of us that we would not want to have to live like this for very long.

But lepers had it worse than merely "social distancing." The "unclean" person—especially lepers—was also forbidden to have any fellowship with God. So, a leper exiled to the wilderness was not allowed to participate in worship activities. They were cut off from God.

I think that is what made Jesus angry when the leper approached him. Jesus saw in that disease a case of one of God's people being kept away from God. It made Jesus mad that this man suffered greatly, both physically and spiritually, because he accidentally acquired leprosy.

This is not what God had in mind when he created the world. When God created humankind in God's own image, he meant for us to have fellowship with Him and to know Him. He did not intend for diseases such as leprosy to get

in the way.

When Sin came into the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience, suffering and disease and death came with it. So, when Jesus sees the leprosy this man suffers from, he knows that his "unclean" state is a consequence of Sin being in the world. It makes Jesus mad, because he has come to fix that very problem.

2. Deceptive Purposes

The second way Mark shows us that Jesus is angry in this situation is by telling us that Jesus "sternly warned him," (v. 43). That is, Jesus "scolded" him (see Mark 14:5). Sometimes when someone loves us they can sound angry when they are warning us about some danger we might be headed for. We warn our young children about the danger of "strangers" by speaking sternly and with an expression that can seem like we're angry about something.

And we are angry about the possibility of an evil person taking our child and harming them in any way. We are not angry with the child, of course. We are angry at the thought of such evil.

It makes sense that this is why Jesus is so intensely emotional about the leper, speaking to him with evident anger. He scolds the leper, because Jesus wants to impress upon him very quickly that there is some kind of danger in telling everyone about what Jesus has just done.

Not only does the potential danger make Jesus angry here. He surely knows that the leper will disobey his command. That makes him angry, too. Jesus knows what is in a person's heart. He knows where their desires are leading. He knows even what they are thinking. (Take a look at Matthew 9:4 and John 2:24-25, for examples.)

According to Mark, immediately after Jesus tells him not to,

the leper goes all around telling everyone the good news of his cleansing by Jesus. In fact, from what we are given in Mark's account, it appears that the man never went to the priest. Another disobedience on his part.

Mark tells us that the man began "to proclaim it freely and to spread the good news," (v. 45). Clearly, then, the leper believes he is doing something good by sharing this good news. In his mind, he is glorifying God by telling everyone what Jesus has done. He might even think that he has now become an instrument of Jesus' mission to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God.

His good intentions are deceiving him to disobey what Jesus has instructed him to do. Jesus knew he would. This is why Jesus "scolded" him. This is why Jesus is already angry.

But Jesus is not angry with the leper, even though the leper will disobey. He knows the leper's intention to glorify God and to help Jesus. He knows that these intentions will be easily used by Satan to deceive the leper into disobedience. Jesus himself knows how crafty Satan can be in even applying Scripture in ways that would have deceived Jesus into disobeying God (Matthew 4:1-11).

Jesus is angry with the worst "stranger" of them all: Satan. When he is sternly warning the leper, Jesus is anticipating how easily he knows Satan will be able to lead the leper into disobeying Jesus by appealing to his good intentions.

We are all too familiar with this one, too. Just think about how easily a husband convinces himself that his wife really does want a new barbecue grill for Christmas. Even though all of her hints have been about jewelry, he can think of several reasons why she'll be even happier if he gets her the new grill!

Likewise, we are easily led by Satan, the Great Deceiver, to imagine "more realistic" forms that our obedience of Jesus should take. Even though Jesus said, "Love your enemies,

and pray for those who persecute you," (Matt. 5:44), we are easily tempted to say, "but Jesus surely did not mean so-called 'Christians' who disagree with beliefs that are important to me."

And so, like the leper, we can easily fall for the deception of good intentions.

3. Disinforming Proclamation

The third thing Jesus gets angry about has something to do with Jesus immediately sending the leper away (Mark 1:43).

The problem is Jesus' manner. Mark actually says that Jesus "cast out" the leper. This is the language used to describe how Jesus casts out demons, forcing them by his divine authority to leave the person they possess. We do not imagine Jesus being gentle with the demons or happy in about it. So, to say that Jesus "cast out" this man is to indicate that Jesus is being quite abrupt with him—perhaps even harsh. Essentially, he says, "Now, get out of here!"

It is not hard to discover what makes Jesus angry this time. Just look at what happens when the leper disobeys Jesus. Mark says

But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere. (Mar 1:45 NAU)

The effect of the leper's disobedience is that Jesus has been "cast out" from his own mission! Instead of traveling to the towns (Mark 1:38), Jesus has to stay in the unpopulated areas. This was not the leper's intention, but it surely

was Satan's purpose in deceiving him to disobey.

Is that so bad, though? Is Jesus' mission interrupted just because he cannot travel to the towns? Mark tells us that the towns are coming to Jesus out in the wilderness. So, isn't it the same thing as if he were able to travel to them?

The problem with the crowds coming to Jesus is that they are coming to him because of the good news about the healing that they heard from the leper. So, just like the crowds in Capernaum, they are coming for healing and for help themselves. But Jesus came to preach the good news that God is beginning his eternal Kingdom, and people can be a part of it if they will "repent and believe the good news." Instead, these crowds of people are *only* hearing the news that Jesus can cure their diseases.

Satan successfully hijacked Jesus' mission so that all people could hear is how Jesus can be of benefit to them in this world. In Satan's world (1 John 5:19).

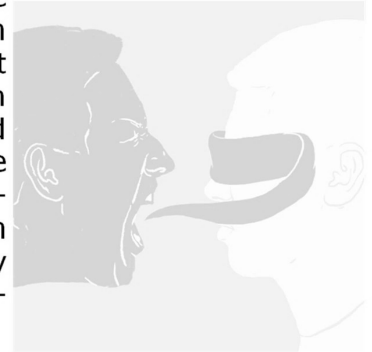
This same kind of thing happens so easily in our desire to serve Jesus and continue his mission to make disciples of all nations.

Over the past century Christians have become very practical about conducting our mission. Instead of echoing Jesus' gospel message, "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news," (Mark 1:15), we started trying to *attract* people to our gatherings. Since many people are lonely, churches offer "fellowship" opportunities for non-believers to share in. Since marriage and family require wisdom to make them work well, churches started attracting prospective members by talking about "Five Ways Jesus Improves Your Marriage."

This tends to teach people to come to Jesus to improve their life in this world. This teaches them to see Jesus as a source of *benefits* rather than the Lord to whom we owe our obedience, worship, and trust. The mission to spread the truth of the gospel becomes instead like many other

"disinformation" campaigns we experience today.

Rather than informing people, "disinformation" provides information that might be true yet somehow has the effect of leading people to believe something that is not true. In this case, the good news that being a Christian has certain benefits for life in this world becomes the only message people really hear. That information prevents them from getting the information they really need—the gospel of salvation in Jesus.



No wonder Jesus was angry when the leper asked to be cleansed. The leper's incurable, terrible disease was evidence of Satan's destructive work among God's creatures. The leper's good intentions in telling people the good news would be easily used against Jesus by Satan's powerful deceptions. So, the great, compassionate, miraculous work of restoring full health to the leper would be twisted by Satan into something that would effectively cast Jesus out of his own mission for a little while by proclaiming disinformation rather than the simple truth.

How Christians Respond

In talking about what made Jesus angry in the case of this leper in Mark 1 we noticed that Jesus was angry about Sin and the destructive and deceptive work of Satan in the world. We have identified three things that made Jesus angry here. To complete our lesson now we only need to pay attention to how we can imitate Jesus response to these things.

Before taking each one in turn, there is a guiding principle

for applying Jesus' example to our own responses to things that make us angry. This principle is suggested by the way Mark begins and ends the narrative. At both ends of this story we are shown that people find Jesus in "the unpopulated areas" (v. 45) of the wilderness. There, they find the healing touch of the Word of God.

So, **the guiding principle** for applying Jesus' example about anger involves two things. First, our response to what makes us angry must involve coming to Jesus where he is found outside of the mainstream society of this world. Second, in coming to Jesus there our goal is that he might provide the healing touch of his Word to remedy the source of our anger (consider John 1:1-3; Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 55:11).

Now, let's return to the three things that made Jesus angry, which are familiar in our experience even today. Let's consider how to respond to them according to the principle of seeking the touch of the Word outside of the normal course of things in this world.

1. Hope

We noticed the strange fact that Jesus got angry when the leper asked to be cleansed of his leprosy. Jesus was angry about this most likely because leprosy is evidence that Sin is destroying the good things God created. In this case, the man's leprosy is an accident of the world we live in. Diseases happen. But that is not the way God made the world to begin with. It is this way now, because Satan succeeded in deceiving humankind to disobey God.

How should we respond when things like this make us angry, or even just very upset in some way?

Think, for example, about how this whole world today is responding to the terrifying, deadly COVID-19 pandemic. Governments including our own mobilized immense re-

sources to supply what is needed to protect people from contracting the disease. They also have been working hard to supply efforts to diagnose cases of it and to track where it has been. But the hope of the entire world is focused on creating a vaccine for this virus. We know that without a vaccine to enable our immunity to the disease, we will not be able to prevent it from being as deadly as it is.

That response to disease makes complete sense to everyone. It is completely natural. No one questions it. However, that is not the *Christian* response. Christians do, of course, help with treatments and cures however we can. There are many Christian medical professionals and scientists and civic leaders. But the Christian response is not found within what is obvious to everyone else in the world. The Christian response is one that can only be found by seeking Jesus, the Word of God, *outside* of the normal course of worldly common-sense.

When we seek the Word of God to touch diseases such as COVID-19, we know that God can heal such things. Easily. However, we also know that as long as this world continues we will never eradicate disease itself. If not COVID-19 then there is always something else. Jesus wanted us to know this so that Satan could not so easily use our fear of death and disease to deceive us into looking to ourselves instead of to Jesus. He said

"Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, ¹¹ and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places **plagues** and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven," (Luke 21:10-11).

He wants us to know that such things will continue until the end. Until Jesus returns on the Day of Judgment.

The Christian response, then, is not to hope for a cure for every disease. The Christian response is to hope for the day when Jesus returns and all of the ills of this world will be

done away with. John the Apostle put it this way:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and **death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.**” ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new,” (Revelation 21:3-5 ESV).

When Jesus returns, we look forward in hope to an eternity of comfort and happiness and health.

2. Trust

We noticed that the second kind of thing that angered Jesus was how easily Satan is able to use our good intentions to deceive us into actually disobeying what Jesus has commanded us to do. The leper might have thought he was helping Jesus and glorifying God by proclaiming the good news of his cleansing to everyone. But Jesus had forbidden him to do so.

Likewise, it is easy for us to think we are helping Jesus when we are actually disobeying him. For example, we might think that we defend Jesus’ honor by separating ourselves from everyone who claims to follow him but does not subscribe to the Christian beliefs that we hold dear. But, if we are to obey Jesus’ command to love our enemies, wouldn’t those people be just the ones we should serve in love? Instead, by rejecting them and staying away from them we disobey Jesus’ command to love our enemies.

How can we possibly withstand the many ways Satan so

easily deceives us into disobeying Jesus when we think we are obeying him?

Our guiding principle for application here points to Jesus, the Word of God, where he may be found *outside* of what is natural and common-sense in this world. What do we find there that can help us?

Think about the way we so naturally get into such deceptions. We think our disobedience is actually obedience, because of the *reasons* we give ourselves. In our example, we might think, “I can’t condone such false teachings by associating with such an unfaithful ‘Christian.’” In certain cases, this is true, according to God’s word. Both Paul and John, as Apostles of Jesus, instruct us not even to eat with a rebellious Christian or a false teacher (1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 John 1:10).

But it is too often the case that we cut ourselves off from others who are sincerely trying to follow Jesus but have different opinions than we do on some things. Our opinions seem to us to be the obvious, “gospel truth.” Relying on our own wisdom, then, we end up disobeying the command of God. That is normal operating procedure in the world we live in. It just makes sense to think of the Bible like any other book. Just read it. It’s meaning is immediately obvious most of the time.

But if we seek the Word outside of worldly common-sense we learn a different response. Through the Apostle Paul Jesus tells us that Jesus’ word, the wisdom it provides, the power to teach us and heal our souls, depends upon communication by the Holy Spirit that Jesus provides (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). We cannot see clearly how to obey Jesus without relying on his Spirit to help us understand the Word we read.

Seeking the healing power of the Word outside the ways of this world leads us to discover just what Solomon advised:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not

lean on your own understanding. (Pro 3:5 ESV)

If the leper had trusted Jesus' word, he would have done everything to avoid telling everyone what Jesus had done, even though he would not have understood why Jesus would want that. In the same way, we need to trust Jesus' word enough to do what he says without letting ourselves off the hook by more "realistic" reasons. In the case of Jesus' command to love our enemies, he meant just what he said.

3. Repent

Finally, we noticed that it made Jesus angry to know that the good work of healing the leper would be craftily used against him by Satan. He knew that Satan would be able to use the illustration of the gospel of the Kingdom of God to *dis*inform people regarding the real good news of the Kingdom Jesus came to proclaim. Instead of hearing that they can "repent and believe the good news," and in Jesus' name escape the coming wrath of God (Luke 3:7), people only heard that Jesus provides some really great benefits for life in this world.

We noticed that, sadly, Christians have been doing the same kind of thing in our recent, well-meaning efforts to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God. Instead of calling people to repent of their ungodliness, serving God as King, we have turned to a strategy of attracting people to Jesus by announcing the many ways Jesus can improve their life. They'll no longer be lonely or hopeless or confused or unfulfilled if they will just start coming to church and start a program of discipleship with us.

This makes complete sense in this world where businesses succeed by creative and continuous *marketing*. Sell the product by telling people first how it will benefit them. Show off the many attractive features of the product. Con-

vince them that it is a product that they need, and they will become loyal customers. That's great for selling soap and computers and cars. But the good news of the Kingdom of God is not a product to be sold. It is a message to be announced, proclaimed.

Going to Jesus, the Word, outside of the common-sense of this world, we see that the gospel mission does not operate according to the logic of business. The Gospel does not call people to come to Jesus to become the best version of themselves. It is certainly not a call to find the key to finally overcome everything we find deficient about ourselves. Least of all is it a strategy for developing our religious organization into a self-sustaining non-profit enterprise with brand recognition nationally or globally.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously wrote, when Jesus calls someone to become a disciple he calls them to come and die. The Gospel call to "repent and believe the good news" is the call to discipleship, which is

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it," (Mark 8:34-35 NAU).

If we try to help Jesus' gospel mission by appealing to worldly desires for personal benefits, we will only be deceived into working against the true message we are supposed to proclaim. If our efforts in the gospel mission aim at attaining benefits for ourselves or for our churches, Satan will easily deceive us to work against the Kingdom of God rather than for it.

The Word of God can protect us from spreading disinformation if we will give ourselves to genuine discipleship by repenting of all of our self-interested ways.

Conclusion

What have we learned from Jesus' example in handling things that made him angry?

We learned, first of all, that Jesus got angry over things that were caused by Sin and its destructive and deceptive effects in this world. His response was not to push these things away. He did not run from the leper even though he hated the disease that made the man suffer so much. Instead, Jesus drew near to the man and the Word of God touched precisely what needed to be healed.

So, if we would follow Jesus, then we must let our anger point out to us what it is that needs the touch of the Word of God. If we are angered, like Jesus was, by evidence of the curse of Sin affecting other people in terrible ways, then our response will be to also draw even closer to them. To touch their pain and deception with the restoring, saving Word of God.

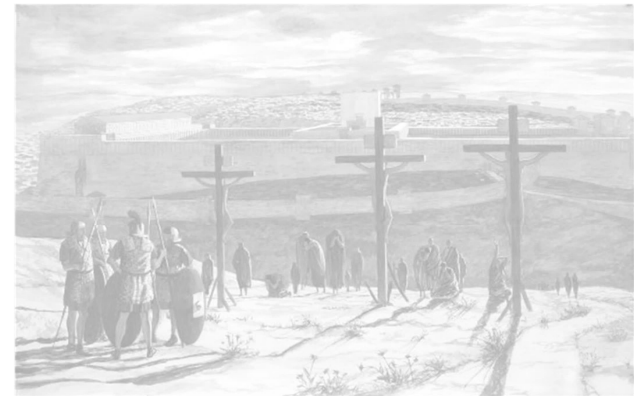
We also learned that the Word of God does its best work and is most evident when sought outside of the normal society of this world. Likewise, we must be careful that our application of Scripture is done according to what God himself has given. If we assume the common-sense of this world, our own reason will be easily used to deceive us into disobedience. Instead, if we devote ourselves entirely dependent upon what God provides to understand how to practice what he has called us to do, we will succeed in faithfully conducting the Kingdom mission.

Let our anger, then, be a sign to us that this world is corrupted by Sin. You and I are not immune from this, though if we are in Jesus we are forgiven. Sometimes our anger will be because, like Jesus, we see the effects of Sin in someone else's life. Very often, though, unlike Jesus, our anger will be because Sin continues to affect our own heart.

So, when we are angry, recognize that Sin still destroys God's good creation. Remember that everyone can only be saved from Sin by finding Jesus *outside* the structures of power and society and common-sense that govern this world.

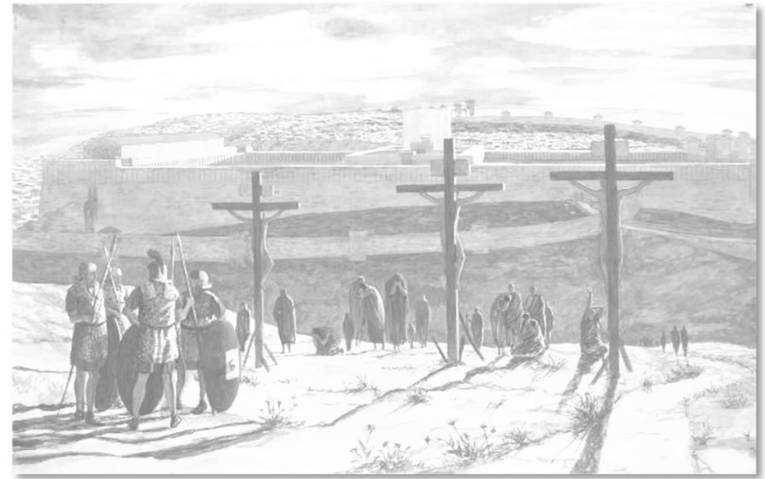
Remember that that is where Jesus provided the one and only remedy for Sin, and for its devastating effects of all kinds. Jesus let Satan cast him out of the holy city of God to the hill called "The Place of the Skull," where Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

Will you meet him there? Will you follow him there?



EASTSIDE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Sunday, May 3, 2020



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Sermon Manuscript for

“Get Angry. Save the World.”

Mark 1:40-45

By Nathan Wheeler, Preacher