

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Unbottled

(Jesus...and your emotional life)

### **Redemptive Anger**

(Mark 3, Galatians 2)

Study #5

#### Introduction: Dangerous, but powerful...

A couple of weeks ago I referred to a comment made by former Texas Longhorns coach Darrell Royal that in the game of football, the passing game is fraught with danger.

When the quarterback passes the ball, three things can happen and two of them are bad. The pass may be dropped, resulting in a missed opportunity. Or the pass may be intercepted, giving a win to the other side.

In our first look at anger, we explored the possibilities of a dropped pass if we express our anger quickly, rather than take James' counsel to be "*slow to anger.*" (James 1:19)

We also considered the possibility of an interception if we "*let the sun go down on our anger*" (Ephesians 4:26). Paul says that if don't recognize and deal with our anger quickly we give the devil an opportunity for a win.

So, anger is dangerous. One thing our world doesn't need any more of is uncontrolled, explosive, vitriolic anger. We've got that.

But anger is an everyday reality, and I don't want us to be so dialed in to the dangers of anger that we miss opportunities to be energized by anger for good and loving things.

This morning, we'll look at one incident from the life of Jesus and some content from the life and teachings of the Apostle Paul to see the possibility that, under the control of someone who is controlled by God's Spirit, anger can result in a tremendous win for God and for good.

There is such a thing as redemptive anger, and we'll see it today from the Bible.

First, we'll turn to Mark's gospel where we'll see an angry Jesus.

#### Jesus, Angry at the Withholding of Good (Mark 3:1-6)

##### **A Tragic Situation (v. 1)**

*[Mark 3:1a] He entered a synagogue again...*

We aren't told into what synagogue Jesus entered. It may have been the one in Capernaum, where He was well-known.<sup>1</sup> Or, it may have been a synagogue He had never visited before.

And, while we aren't told here, I might as well say it now. He entered the synagogue on a Saturday, which was the Jewish Sabbath.

By the time this event occurs, the word about Jesus had begun to spread. People knew Him as a teacher and as a healer. He was collecting disciples who followed Him - even some (like Matthew) with dubious reputations.

He was making a splash, developing a reputation, becoming a Somebody. But this story doesn't begin with a focus on Jesus. No, the focus is on a man with a physical disability who showed up for worship.

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<sup>1</sup> Capernaum was Jesus' home-base during His three years of active ministry.

***[Mark 3:1] He entered a synagogue again; and a man was there whose hand was withered.***

A useless, withered hand is a terrible hardship. In the best case, like in a high-tech society, there are workarounds that could make a withered hand a nuisance.

But in an ancient society where a man's livelihood depended on physical labor, a withered hand was a devastating condition.

This man suffered from a chronic problem, not an acute problem. And when Jesus entered the synagogue where this man was, the Pharisees and the other leaders went on high alert.

### **Jesus Under Scrutiny (v. 2)**

***[2] And they were watching Him closely to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.***

*The Pharisees are now critics*

Now, not long before this incident, the Pharisees had been interested learners. Some of them had gathered in Simon's home to hear Jesus teach. They were curious, and in a good way.

But He has gone too far for them to be fans, now. He claimed to be able to forgive sin. He has lax views of fasting. They now see Jesus in a negative light, and they have become critics, waiting for Him to get out of line again. They want to trap Him.

And how do they think He might get out of line? By healing.

*The healing trap*

See, the Pharisees had rules regulating Sabbath behavior, right down to the practice of medicine.

And they were convinced that their extra-biblical Sabbath rules were as binding as God's Law to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest.

Pharisaic law said that if there was a matter of life and death, doctoring was permitted. They said it was OK for a woman to receive assistance in childbirth on the Sabbath. (How gracious)

But tending to a minor wound was against the rules; wiping blood off a cut was considered wrong. Doctoring a chronic condition was not for the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup>

This man with the withered hand is not on the verge of death. There is every opportunity for Jesus to tell the man, "*Don't take two aspirin and see Me in the morning. We'll take care of that hand - tomorrow.*"

But He didn't do that. Jesus walked right into the Pharisaic trap.

### **Jesus in Motion (vv. 3-5)**

*A word to the man (v. 3)*

***[3] He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!"***

Even if you have never read this story, you suspect that Jesus is about to perform a very "in your face" public act.

Jesus and the man are now at the front of the synagogue standing together. Jesus turned His attention from the man to "**them**" - the Pharisees - and asked a simple question.

*A word to the critics (v. 4)*

***[4] And He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent.***

You can hear the edge in Jesus' words. This was a question with a bite to it.

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<sup>2</sup> Later, Jesus will spark controversy for healing a blind man when He made mud out of dirt plus spittle and wiped them on the man's eyes. Combining spittle and dirt was considered the same thing as making mortar, which was, of course, work.

Of course, the Pharisees would have argued that this man wasn't in any acute danger. They would have been fine with a "tomorrow" healing. But not on the Sabbath.

Jesus' point in asking the question was that the Sabbath, of all days, was a perfect day for a healing. It was a great day for doing good.

To Jesus' question the Pharisees gave only a thoroughly incriminating silence.

*An angry Healer (v. 5)*

***[5a] After looking around at them with anger,<sup>3</sup> grieved at their hardness of heart...***

That's right. Jesus was angry. He was good, and angry.

And the way this incident plays out tells us that God made us with the capacity for anger for a reason. There are reasons beyond what we see here, but what we do see here is that anger can serve to energize us to do good.

Jesus was angry at the Pharisees' insensitivity to human need. He was angry at their coldness toward the man with a withered hand.

Jesus didn't then and He doesn't like it now when God's people are hardened and inflexible, when we are more committed to obeying human-made rules and traditions than we are to helping someone out.

The man's need AND the Pharisees' hard hearts roused Jesus to anger, and to loving action.

***[5b]...He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.***

The healing was instantaneous. And the instant the healing was accomplished, Jesus became the target of an assassination plot.

***[6] The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might put Him to death.***

And we won't miss the irony of the Pharisees, who had objected to Jesus' healing on the Sabbath, made plans - on the Sabbath - to murder Jesus.

*Consider...*

There are a few other places in the Gospels where we see an angry Jesus.

I think that He was angry when He removed the animals and the buyers and sellers and the moneychangers from the Court of the Gentiles part of the temple precincts. (Both times - John 2 and Mark 11)

I also think that He was angry when He spoke against the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, identifying them as hypocrites, blind guides, vipers, and white-washed tombs.

But here in Mark 3 is the only time Jesus is explicitly said to be angry, and that's why I wanted to explore this incident with you. We know He was angry because the Bible tells us He was angry. And what happened?

He was genuinely angry. You would have picked up on His anger if you had been there. He may very well have raised His voice past a calm monotone.

But He didn't lose His temper and He didn't fly off the handle. This is a very determined, very intentional, purposeful act.

Jesus didn't rant and rave at those who didn't care. In complete control of Himself, He used the energy fueled by anger to help someone. He did good to someone in need.

While He was angry, He gave His undivided attention to a man the people He was angry with had ignored and dismissed. Jesus turned anger into a pathway for love.

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<sup>3</sup> This is one of the few times when Scripture records Jesus' anger and is the only explicit reference to Jesus' anger in the New Testament.

So, let's learn from Jesus.

The end of anger for us is not to rant and rave at those who don't do good.

How much good would it do if we used our anger about people who are food insecure to rail against people who don't do anything about that problem? Not much.

How much better to do what lots of people here do, who may very well be angry about the availability of food to the hungry.

They channel the energy sparked by their anger into regular donations to the Food Pantry. The result is that lots of people come to the church and get food and get prayed for because YOU channeled your anger into groceries.

It wouldn't do any good to throw a fit about the government or schools or businesses that don't provide language training for people who aren't fluent in English.

But a few people here - who may very well be angry at the plight of immigrants who haven't had opportunity to learn English - channel their anger into loving service with our ESL ministry.

There are lots of Christians in lots of places in our world today who are suffering persecution.

It's enough to make anyone angry.

If you are angry about that, you could productively channel your anger into **prayer** for God to protect your Christian family that is living in hard places, **giving** to organizations that help persecuted Christians, and **prayer** that God would touch the hearts of the persecutors with Jesus' love.

Your anger can become something beautifully redemptive, as you submit your anger to God. He will energize you to give, to love, to pray, to serve.

That's Jesus, modeling redemptive anger. Now, we'll turn our focus from Jesus to see what the Apostle Paul can teach us about redemptive anger.

We're turning to what is, out of all of Paul's letters, an angry letter: Galatians.

### **Paul, Angry at a Gospel-Compromising Partiality (Galatians 2)**

#### **Paul and Friends, in Jerusalem (vv. 1-10)**

We open to Galatians, chapter 2, where Paul relates a couple of backstories to this letter he wrote to his friends in the Galatian region of Asian Minor (modern-day Turkey).

Paul tells us that fourteen years after his conversion, he went to Jerusalem with his ministry partners Barnabas, who was Jewish, and Titus, who was a Gentile.

These three went to Jerusalem to help the Christians there who were suffering, both because of a famine and due to persecution.

They came from the region of Syria with a financial gift that had been collected from many of the Gentile churches after a prophet, Agabus, (Acts 11) told them about their suffering brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

The motive for this trip was love, and the point of the trip was to show the great unity that existed in Jesus between Jews and Gentiles.

It was a wonderful visit, but the visit was not without challenges.

While they were there, some Jewish Christians wanted to force Titus, a Gentile, to be circumcised. Paul refers to these guys as ***false***

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<sup>4</sup> This trip to Jerusalem is usually referred to as "the famine relief visit."

*brethren*”, which I take to mean “*brethren who were at that time being false*”<sup>5</sup>.

They were teaching that it was necessary for a Gentile to not only believe in Jesus but also to become Jewish if he wanted to be saved.

Paul wouldn’t hear of such a thing.

Titus was a Gentile, yes. And he was a believer in Jesus, probably one of the leaders of the church at Antioch.

Paul knew that Titus was a saved man, circumcised or not, so he put his apostolic foot down and said, “*No way!*”<sup>6</sup>

It appears to me that Paul was angry at the attempt of these legalists to bring his Gentile friend, Titus, under the Jewish law.

Now let’s watch what Paul does with his anger. He channeled his anger into a strong stand for the truth of the Gospel: ***[Galatians 2:5] But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.***

Paul stood solid as a rock. Faith alone in Christ alone saves. Period. End of story. No Jewish ritual or rules apply.

Further, Paul aligned his treatment of Titus with the gospel message, which told him to never treat someone who has placed faith in Jesus as a second-class member of the church.

Everybody gets into the church the same way. Believe in Jesus. So, we are all of equal value in Jesus’ church.

Circumcising Titus would have said something very different.

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<sup>5</sup> Some take “false brethren to mean that they weren’t brethren at all.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy, being half-Jewish *was* circumcised (Acts 16:1-3). Paul yielded to the weak brethren who would have stumbled over a half-Jew not being circumcised (Timothy), but not to false brethren who demanded that Titus become a Jew to be a true Christian.

It would have said that Titus, a believer in Jesus, was not *really* a Christian, wasn’t *really* right with God, unless he submitted to the Mosaic Law.

Titus was left free to remain as he was.

And the way he was treated shouted FREEDOM. All who come to Christ can remain as they are with respect to culture. No hoops to jump through to get into the inner circle.

Just like we saw with Jesus, Paul channeled his anger into a redemptive path.

And so, with Titus protected, Paul and the other church leaders worked hard to build on their unity in Christ as they recognized God’s hand on each of their ministries.

Then, after a great, super friendly, encouraging end to their visit, Paul and Barnabas and Titus left Jerusalem and headed back home to Antioch.

Evidently, Paul soon left Antioch for a bit and while he was gone Simon Peter traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Sparks soon flew when Paul got back to town.

### **Paul and Friends, in Antioch (vv. 11-14)**

*Peter’s hypocrisy (vv. 11-13)*

***[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.***

And we wonder, “*What in the world did Peter do in Antioch?*”

OK. Paul tells us what it was that Peter did.

**Peter’s actions (v. 12)**

**[12] For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw<sup>7</sup> and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.**

When Peter first arrived in Antioch on a friendly visit, he ate meals with the Gentile Christians there. He went to their pot-luck suppers.

In times past, Jews had always kept their distance from Gentiles due to concerns over ceremonial defilement. But Peter knew that because of what Christ had accomplished on the cross, those concerns were no longer of any concern.

God even gave Peter a vision (Acts 10) proving that no food and no person was to be considered unclean anymore. A Christian could eat whatever he wanted to eat and could hang with whomever he wanted to hang.

So, we can imagine that Peter enjoyed culinary delights in Antioch he never had before - crab, lobster, bacon.

But then, while Paul was still gone, a group of **“men from James”** (from the completely Jewish church at Jerusalem) came to Antioch. These were Jewish men, and followers of the Mosaic Law.

When they arrived, Peter separated himself from the Gentiles and stopped eating with them.

It wasn't that Peter had become convinced that eating with Gentiles or eating bacon was wrong. No, he knew that the restrictions of the Law had been abolished.

For some reason, while these **“men from James”** were in town, Peter stopped hanging with the Gentiles. He withdrew from them.

We don't know if these guys spoke harshly to Peter, rebuked him, or made faces at him. For whatever reason, Peter didn't want to

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<sup>7</sup> Word used to describe the pulling back of troops in battle.

risk their disapproval about what he was eating or about who he was eating with.

He avoided the Gentiles. Ignored them. Tore up their invitations to dinner. Treated them like second-class citizens of Jesus' church - exactly what Paul had refused to do, earlier, to Titus, back in Jerusalem.

As almost always happens, Peter's actions had a ripple effect.

#### Peter's actions' effects (v. 13)

**[13] The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.<sup>8</sup>**

I've always been surprised that Barnabas - Mr. Encouragement! - sided with Peter in separating from the Gentiles. But peer pressure can get the best of the best of us. It even got the best of Barnabas.<sup>9</sup>

Well, eventually, Paul returned to Antioch. And when he saw what was happening, he got angry.

He was angry about the treatment the Gentiles were getting from Peter and **“the men from James”** and his anger energized him to speak up to protect the new, Gentile Christians.

Paul's only concern was that the Gentiles - the newcomers, the minority in Jesus' church in Antioch - would feel disenfranchised by Peter's withdrawal. He wasn't at all concerned that the people in power would be offended by what he had to say to Peter.

The Apostle Paul publicly called the Apostle Peter (!) - on the carpet for hypocrisy.

#### *Paul's anger (v. 14)*

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<sup>8</sup> Hypocrisy is concealing one's real character, and purposefully seeking to create a false impression.

<sup>9</sup> **[13] The rest of the Jews** refers to those residing in Antioch. Peter's hypocrisy could have created a schism, creating a Gentile church and a Jewish church.

**[14] But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"**

THAT is some very strong, angry language.

And what was it, again, that Peter had done? He stopped taking his meals with the Gentiles. That was all.

Because of that, Paul mounted an offensive against Peter. He charged him with not being "**straightforward**" (literally, "not standing upright") when it came to the Gospel.<sup>10</sup>

Now, we can all see that there was a terrible relational failure here. Paul says that it was more than just being impolite to the Gentiles.

Peter had failed to align his life with the settled reality of the Gospel - that there is no Jew vs Gentile partiality with God; that because of Jesus, no one is unclean; that in Christ there is no place for divisions - all are of equal worth and value.

By refusing to eat with the Gentiles, Peter had re-drawn an Old Testament line that had separated humanity into classes. By separating from the Gentiles at mealtime, Peter rebuilt a wall Jesus had torn down.

That sparked Paul's anger, which energized him to speak and to act. He channeled that angry energy into defending the newcomers, the minority, the outsiders, the Gentiles.

- He spoke because he was angry that a fellow apostle had done something that could easily have permanently divided the church.
- He spoke because he was angry that the Gentiles' place at the table was in jeopardy due to Peter's hypocrisy.

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<sup>10</sup> This is the third time Peter and Paul have been together. (1). When Paul went to Jerusalem, a visit recorded in Galatians 1:18; Acts 9:26-30. (2). When Paul, Barnabas, and Titus brought the famine relief money from Antioch to Jerusalem. (Galatians 2:1-10; Acts 11:27-30) (3) Here, at the third meeting, when Paul rebuked Peter for hypocrisy. (Galatians 2:11-21)

- He spoke because he was angry that those who didn't fit in to the majority culture weren't being welcomed and that hospitality wasn't being lavished on the few by the many.

Anger fueled Paul's very animated response to Peter. I think it was also anger that prompted him to write Galatians, his "angry letter", in the first place.

He was angry that new Christians had been led to accept a works-oriented Gospel.

He channeled that anger into one of the clearest presentations of the Gospel of grace we find in any of his writings, namely that eternal life is given by God to the one who believes in Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

He was angry that Christians were buying into a Gospel that didn't set them free.

He channeled that anger into a passionate invitation for the Galatians to live in the freedom Christ had won for them, and to not allow themselves to be subject to a yoke of slavery to rules that no longer apply.<sup>12</sup>

He was angry that the false teaching they had followed was leading to disunity and infighting in the church.

So, he reminded them that in Jesus **[Galatians 3:28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female;** - or rich or poor, black, Latino, or white, Democrat or Republican or Libertarian - **for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** And he told them to fight for unity by serving one another through love. (Galatians 5:13)

Just like Jesus. Paul channeled the energy created by anger into redemptive expressions.

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<sup>11</sup> See Galatians 3:6-14.

<sup>12</sup> See Galatians 4:21-31 where he assured his readers that they were the spiritual children of Sarah, Abraham's wife, not of Hagar, the bondwoman. Keep reading into chapter 5 where he pleads with them to walk in freedom.

**Conclusion:**

In our time in the Bible this morning, I've laid out two incidents involving anger.

We have seen Jesus channel His anger at the Pharisees into a healing act on behalf of a suffering man He met in a synagogue.

And we have seen Paul channel his anger at Peter's hypocrisy and his anger at problems in the Galatian churches into hard truth, spoken with love.

The threads tying these two storylines together is that Jesus and Paul experienced the emotion of anger, did not allow that anger to control them, and channeled the energy that the anger produced in ways that honored God, redemptively.

And that, when it comes to anger, is our assignment. So, what are you angry about?

Are you angry about some aspect of the way our church works/doesn't work?

Are you angry at a family member, close friend, neighbor?

Are you angry about the way fellow Christians are behaving and the mark that is making against the cause of Christ?

Could you pray to God this week about how you could follow Jesus' lead by creatively using the energy anger creates to love your children, your friends, your spouse?

Remember, the end of anger is not to be ranting and raving, complaining or grumbling. It is to be channeled into redemptive acts of service and into truthful words, spoken in love.