

The temple cleansing.

Everyone's favorite passage when they are angry at an injustice they have perceived. "Ah yes! Jesus was angry and sinless, therefore anger in itself is not a sin!" True enough. And then we proceed to go about being angry – and nothing bad ever happens, then does it?

It would be like me going on a tour of the INL and seeing the reactor being put to good use. We are learning things, we are powering things safely. Ah, don't you see, radiation can be used safely and productively. So which of you are then going to let me go play with the reactor? Nothing bad will happen there will it?

Jesus is able in his anger to offer judgment in the temple rightly and without sin.

That does not mean that you are capable of the same. And I dare say, if we truly believe we are poor, miserable sinners, we should admit that most of the times we are angry, sin is close, very close, very, very close at the door.

And I daresay, to make a cheesy preaching move, that when we handle anger, we should approach it like a nuclear reactor. Do we have our PPE on? Are there fail safes in place? Are there emergency exits? Are there test bays and clearance levels and background checks? Are there trainings and safety doors? I am not joking either. What sets your conscience off? In what ways are you unable to be objective? And if your answer is, "I'm objective in all ways because I am so

rational,” then you are not objective at all. “Take heed, lest you fall.” If everyone else around you isn’t objective, and only you are, well there is a common denominator and it is the subjective, not objective, you.

Now let’s be clear. Anger is, as we all correctly deduce from this reading, not in itself a sin. We also see this in Ephesians where Paul reminds us: “In your anger do not sin.” Which I will point out is a warning! But yes, the implication is you can be angry and not sin. Anger is the correct response to injustice. To see someone snatch a ladies purse on the crosswalk and think nothing of it... well that isn’t right, is it? So yes, don’t leave here thinking anger is a sin, but also don’t leave here thinking anger is not something to be handled with great, great care.

And if you think I am just a stick in the mud about it. Consider a handful of verses and as I read them fight against the urge to think “That’s right Pastor that person over there needs to hear this.” No, you need to hear it. Because you have anger. As do I.

Psalm 37:8 "Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil."

Psalm 86:15 "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

Proverbs 14:29 "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly."

Proverbs 15:18 "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention."

Proverbs 22:24 "Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man."

Ecclesiastes 7:9 "Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools."

Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger..."

Ephesians 4:31 "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."

Colossians 3:8 "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth."

1 Timothy 2:8 "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling..."

James 1:19-20 "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 of God."

And finally something from the angry man today, Jesus: Matt 5:22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

Great care. Great care. Is to be paired with anger. And just because today we see anger wielded in the hands of an expert, a sinless one, that does not mean we should pull it off the shelf and start waving it about like there are no consequences.

Instead may we turn our anger over to the expert, the sinless one, and help him guide us in it. We see this in the most painfully angry words of the Bible, the imprecatory psalms that speak of bashing babies heads into rocks! They hand that anger over to God, "Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem..." Psalm 137. They say "Remember God what they did to us... and you repay, even though this is what we would want..."

So hand that anger over to the Lord. When you see an injustice: Do we need to call the authorities that God has given to curb this evil? That's handing it over to the Lord. Do we need to speak up, interject, defend? And do we need to ask

forgiveness if our handling went too far? When we say that insult, when we spread that rumor because you don't like that person, when we jump to a conclusion without knowing the facts, when we shout when we shouldn't have, when we said what we didn't mean, or we said what we did mean but not in a loving way?

Hand that over to the expert too. He knows how to handle anger. He know how to handle our sin when we take our anger too far. He will take that upon himself and kill it on his cross, where the Father's perfect and righteous anger for sin and injustice will be satisfied – but not on us, on Jesus. God be praised. God be praised he does not handle us in anger, but separates us from our sin, is angry at *it*, and then turns toward us in love, in restoration, in healing.

Which, back to our text, is what he longs for for his people. The money changers and animal sellers ostensibly served a good purpose. They allowed pilgrims to offer sacrifices at the temple, and thus this system *facilitated* worship at the temple, but most would say at some point this trading and selling became a hindrance to the worship. Fleecing the poor people who came to worship and needed sacrifices. When supply and demand is so skewed, the prices go up – you've been to an airport, right? Most would say this “taking advantage” of the worshippers raised his wrath.

Other options, such as Caesar's likeness being on the coins, or this being symbolic of the time of sacrifice ending soon, are possible but hard to corroborate. He does say the purpose of the house is not trade but, in other Gospels, prayer. Commune with God. And woe to those who hinder or demand payment for such things.

Does this mean we are hypocrites for taking an offering? I don't think so. After all, the Lord called for the tithe in the Old Testament, Jesus blesses the widow's mites, and Paul tells us workers are worth the wages. Though I will point out there is no charge for a baptism or funeral or service. No, no, no. No charge for the gifts themselves.

This text is a warning to putting up walls between God's Law and Gospel and the people. God wants to care for his people, and to stand in the way of that... be careful. God will act.

And he does in our text, certainly. But soon the issue of his wrath soon turns from the *cause* of it, to the *authority* of it. "What gives you the right to do this in the temple?"

Jesus' answer is cryptic. He says destroy this temple (which temple?) and in three days I will raise it up." The people gathered and criticizing Jesus are unaware that there were actually two temples, two places where God's presence was made

manifest among them. Yes, Two temples were in their midst. They are unaware of this and assume he is referring to the big one made out of stones (which let's be honest Jesus could raise up in three days as well). And so they go on about how it took 46 years to make that temple under Ezra and Nehemiah.

Yet the text makes clear Jesus is referring to another temple in their midst. Himself. And if that seems a stretch consider that He is the presence of God with man. He is God made manifest, He is the Word made flesh that tabernacles among the people. Furthermore, since He is the only Son of the Father, and if that stone temple is the Father's house, well then it is the Son's rightful house too.

And can the Father, or the Son, kick someone out of their own house if they want? Yes, they can. And so that is the authority by which he can kick the vendors from the temple. It's his house.

This authority is further corroborated, as he says, in his resurrection. Where we have proof that the Father accepted his work, his sacrifice, and brings the Son into the fullness of the inheritance of Glory at his right hand.

And I would add, that even after those stones were destroyed, as Jesus prophesied, Jesus still has authority over the house, the Church of God around the world. He is still present with His Church around the world. May we be a people who are slow

to anger, who base what is just or not on his authoritative word, and may we be a people who offer his gifts freely and take them freely.

Don't miss that fact. If Jesus is angry that people were kept from receiving his gifts, he rejoices in people who DO receive his gifts. Jesus clears, literally, the way for hurting, broken, sinful people to come to God and receive his gifts. May we stand, by faith, by the Call of God's Word and Spirit, in that line of sinners ready to unworthily receive. Jesus looks at the line of people going to the temple to be cleansed of their sin, and he fights for them. For you. And so His Word goes forth and he enables it, clears the way, for it to go forth to bring life to his people. Jesus will act to save, he will push things out of the way, he will give his very own life as the free sacrifice for you, he will shed his blood for you and, on the last day or when he calls you to himself, he will usher you into the Father's presence, the actual throne room, where you need not be afraid of your past sins and failures. For he is there to speak on your behalf even as he has already fought and sacrificed for you and even as he is risen with authority to do just that. God be praised. Amen.



