

Thy Very Heart: My Heart Healed by His

~Matthew 23~

Week four of series, “His Heart’s Anger,” February 21, 2021,
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--The purpose of this series--

We are putting our tired, cold, and weary hearts before God’s great heart, asking God for healing and renewal.

Remember that our faith is far more than a set of ideas. It has an **affective center** where our hearts come in contact with God’s glorious heart.

Our approach for the rest of the series will be to put our hearts before the flowing stream of truth and love coming from God’s heart by turning to **Scripture**. Then we plead and **pray** that the **Spirit** would supernaturally make the truths we encounter take root inside of us.

--What we’ve studied over the last few weeks--

In **Matt. 11**, we saw that Jesus’ heart is **gentle** and **lowly**, and therefore we can run to him.

In **2 Cor. 11**, we saw that ultimate comfort is found in God’s presence, which we often experience through brothers and sisters in Christ.

--Opening thoughts on Matt. 23 and Jesus’ anger--

In Matt. 23, we find the gentle and lowly Jesus pronouncing rebukes against Jerusalem’s religious leaders, capped off with: “you serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?” (v. 33).

From slight irritation to outright indignation, the heart of Jesus can boil with anger. This prompts some questions:

- What do we make of this part of his heart? How does it not contradict the other attributes we run to, like his love and mercy?
- How should it shape our own heart towards him? Should we be terrified? On edge?

- How might coming into a relationship with a God whose heart sometimes burns with anger, heal and reshape our own hearts?

--Matt. 23: Jesus' anger arises from his love--

There are at least two pitfalls of angry people. First, some are *inherently angry*. They're always on edge, easily provoked, and often mean. Second, some are *indifferent* to anger. They remain unmoved by things that should move them because they lack moral sensibilities or are too fearful.

Jesus is neither of these things. We see in Matt. 23 that Jesus' anger is the natural movement of his love when confronted by evil.

Two important contextual notes:

- (1) Seven times Jesus addresses "The scribes and Pharisees," and he does so while "the crowds and disciples" are observing (v. 1). Jesus has a particular compassion for the crowds, who he feels are like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36).

His rebukes of Jewish Leadership are an act of protection for his people and are motivated by love for his people.

- (2) Jesus' deeper motives are confirmed by what he says at the end of this chapter. As he looks around at Jerusalem, his heart is moved with sorrow and pity:

23:37. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*

Luke even tells us that Jesus wept over the city (Luke 19:41).

So, Jesus's anger in Matt. 23 arises because his heart is moved when that which he loves is threatened.

Two important notes about Jesus' nature:

- (1) *Anger is not his most essential nature.* Jesus's heart is not angry by nature. Rather, it is loving and compassionate by nature.

- (2) *It is not indifferent.* Keep in mind that anger is not the opposite of love. Hate and indifference are the opposites of love. Thus, anger and love are *not* incompatible God's heart.

Of course, not all anger is healthy or justified. Anger may be likened to smoke from a fire, which you see from miles away. It could be smoke from a well-contained brush fire or from a house going up in flames. We must follow the smoke to its source and ask what is making Jesus angry.

--Matt. 23: Jesus is angry about abuses of power--

Jesus' anger arises not from a desire to protect himself or impatience with the crowd. Jesus' anger is over abuses of power.

The Scribes and Pharisees were some of the most powerful people in Jerusalem. They were the self-appointed religious leaders and experts in the law (and teachers of how to apply the law in daily life).

Keep in mind, at this time there was no separation between religious and public life. Religion, economics, education, and politics comingled. Everything came from the Israel's Scriptures.

Therefore, these leaders had great power and responsibility over Israel's religion *and* the people's well-being.

There are at least three important themes of Jesus' seven woes:

- (1) They tout the keys to the Kingdom but lock people out (vv. 13,15)

23:13,15. *But woe to you...hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in...you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.*

By claiming authority to handle the Law, they effectively held the Kingdom's keys. Instead of letting people in, they locked them out.

- (2) They emphasize rules but miss the deeper meaning (vv. 23-24)

23:23-24. *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These*

you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

They were experts in the minutia of the law, such as guidance for tithing produce (see Deut. 14:22-27)—but they didn't understand its deeper essence of God's ways: justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

God does not ask his people to tithe because he needs money but to train hearts. (Ps. 50:10,12,14). God is after the heart, which is expressed in what we do outwardly *and* who we are inwardly.

(3) They appear righteous without but are rotten within (vv. 27-28)

23:27-28. *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

The term "hypocrites" was originally used to signal theatrical giftedness in Greek theater. Here, though, it is not compliment.

The religious leaders loved looking righteous, but on the inside they were unclean. To be associated with dead men's bones was particularly scathing, as it was a sign of being deep uncleanness.

--Summary of what's been covered so far--

- (a) Jesus hates abuses of power. His anger here is directed at those in power in Jerusalem.
- (b) Jesus knows that most people will follow the crowd; and the crowd follows the culture; and the culture is shaped by those at the top.

What would Jesus have to say about religious leaders today? Would he find pastors giving watered-down messages that keep people from truth? Would he find obsession with programs and numbers rather than seeking justice, showing mercy, and learning what it means to be faithful? (Mic. 6:8.)

What about cultural priests—those in universities, government, or Hollywood (i.e., the brilliant, the powerful, and the beautiful)? Do they claim truth while shutting people off from God? Do they speak of justice and equality, but know nothing about the Cross of Christ?

When Jesus sees those in positions of leadership abusing power, truncating the truth, or lacking integrity, he burns with anger.

--Matt. 23: Jesus's anger burns hot, but it is slow--

First—Jesus' anger burns hot (and this is reassuring).

Jesus' anger burns hot when that which he loves is threatened: and he loves His people, he loves justice and righteousness, he loves his father's honor, and, if you have come to him, he loves you.

Recall Sam's story about the assistant principal who burned with anger over the bullying of a young girl at school. He was not indifferent. He took responsibility to do something.

Jesus is like that. He stands before all injustices and then with all the seriousness of eternity says: *This is wrong; their sins will not go unpunished. I will make all things right.*

Second—Jesus' anger burns slow (and this is also reassuring).

At some point, we all have to let Jesus' gaze fall on us. We find that Jesus is not quick to rebuke, and it pleases him infinitely more to show mercy rather than wrath.

Across the Bible, God's anger is described as "slow" (See Ps. 103:8).

God's anger is described as slow, and qualified by statements about his love, forgiveness, and mercy. Why? Because while God upholds the scales of justice, it does not delight him to punish a man—it delights him to forgive.

Jesus models this slow anger in Matt. 23. After verbally rebuking the Pharisees, he becomes silent in the days ahead—like a sheep led to the slaughter. Rather than punishing them, he takes their sins upon himself: he will "drink the cup" of God's wrath (Matt. 26:39).

Paraphrasing Paul, "while these men are still sinners, hypocrites, blind guides and false teachers, Jesus will die for them, saving them from the wrath (the anger) of God" (Rom. 5:8-9).

Only by the Cross do we understand God's anger: it burns white hot against all sin and injustice; but God takes that heat upon himself, so we don't have to. When we look at Jesus, we see anger in the hands of grace.

--Study questions--

The purpose of this series is to put our hearts before God's, asking God for healing and renewal. How is that going? What has it looked like to "put your heart before God's"? Any frustrations or praises or thoughts to share?

Can you think of other examples in Scripture that show God's anger? What is your instinctive response to these passages? Do they bother you? Or put you ill at ease? Or reassure you? Or strike a chord?

Read Luke 19:28-48. How do Jesus' love and anger come together? What do we learn about the masses, Jewish leadership, and Jesus in this passage?

Sam shared about the principal who stood up for the bullied girl with righteous anger. Can you think of examples in your life where you witnessed someone's righteous anger? What did you feel in that moment?

Re-read the 3 themes of Jesus' 7 woes (pgs. 3-4). What stands out? Do we (as a church body or as individuals) struggle with these sins? How so?

Sam said, "God upholds justice, but it does not delight him to punish a man—it delights him to forgive." Is this difficult to believe and live out?

Read Matt. 26:36-46 (Jesus at Gethsemane). How does this show that God's anger both burns hot and is mercifully slow?

--When time allows--

[Here is an article titled, "God's Love and God's Wrath,"](#) that may be helpful as you bring this topic, which can feel like a conundrum, before the Lord. Author D. A. Carson is a New Testament scholar at Trinity Evangelical.

[This Bible Project video on Matthew 14-28](#) provides excellent context for what comes before and after the seven woes, and what it all means.

[A. W. Tozer's *The Knowledge of the Holy*](#) was recommended to us a couple weeks ago, and it probably could be reasonably recommended from here on out. Chapters 17 (justice) and 20 (love) pair well, but so do all the chapters in succession.