

Wouldn't it be great if we could just luxuriate for a while in the Beatitudes? Calgon, take me away. Blessed, blessed, blessed. Jesus musing beautiful poetic words to us over and over again. But wouldn't that get boring? Don't you want Jesus to give you the hard stuff?

Well, you're in luck. Over the next 3 weeks we're going to look at a section of the Sermon on the Mount known as the Antitheses. It's called this because Jesus starts each lesson with the words, "You have heard it said." This will be followed with several different and difficult topics. We are going to wrestle with the things of Anger, Divorce and Adultery, and finally, Retaliation and Enemies.

For each time Jesus says... You have heard it said, he will follow with these words, "But I have said". The first question that may come to your mind is "Does this mean Jesus is going to make a change to the laws about these things?"

Jesus settles that question at the very beginning of this section of his discourse. He says back in vs 17. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." He follows this statement with verse 18, words that we've heard many different times and in many different ways. "For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."

The Greek word for letter in vs 18 is iota. This was the name of the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet. In Hebrew it would be yod or stroke. The King James rendition of jots and tittles is a mix of iota and stroke.

Now what was Jesus saying with that whole fulfill thing? Who does he think he is anyway? Jesus is not saying that once he says or does something we can just check that box. What Jesus is saying is that "fulfilling" the Torah means drawing its meanings out fully. All of its implications.

With these antitheses Jesus is not opposing the Torah or the law at all. Jesus is actually extending them. Jesus is doing what all good Jewish rabbis do. His antitheses are building a fence around each point of the Torah.

We say fences make good neighbors. At our homes a fence protects what's inside. With these antitheses, Jesus is building a fence around the Torah. Creating circumstances that make violation of these laws more difficult.

Today we will tackle anger. Why would anger be a fence around the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill?" Well, if you are not angry, you're less likely to commit murder.

Before we dive further into this topic, let's look at an example of just how anger can cause any situation to go sideways. This is a clip from the movie Inside Out. Riley and her family have just moved from Minnesota to San Francisco. Everything is different for Riley and not necessarily in good ways. She's just finished her first day of school. She is dismissive when her mom asks how her first day went. Let's see how she and her parents handle the rest of this discussion of her first day of school.

VIDEO [Here](#).

If you've ever been a kid...you know exactly how this feels. If you've ever been a parent, you know exactly how this feels. Guys, sorry, we know you don't just sit around thinking about sports.

As we discuss anger today let's talk about places, where what Jesus is saying about anger does not apply. As scribes copied these words from Matthew, occasionally they would add the words, "without a cause." Injustice is a worthy cause for anger. If we are not made angry by suffering, by cheating, or by indifference, then are we human?

There are many types of anger, but let's talk about two types for today. One is visceral anger. This is the kind of anger that hits us immediately. Someone steals your parking spot at the grocery store. Someone cuts in front of you at Taco Bell. The time between action and reaction is small. We honk at that car, we snarl at the person at Taco Bell. We can work on anger like this, but it will take time. These reactions are less likely to lead to violence.

Meditative anger, that's the dangerous one. This kind of anger grows over time. We might call it stewing. The longer we stew the worse it becomes.

Any type of anger gets fuel from at least 2 places. Unmet expectations and fear. It's like when you're supposed to meet someone for lunch at a certain time. You get there on time, they do not. Before long thoughts start to arise. "I bet they forgot. I bet they won't show up. How dare they. They don't care about me. Making me wait. Isn't there any regard for my well-being?" Finally, our friend arrives with a casual, "Sorry I'm a little late". (A little?) This is where we have a decision to make. Do we launch a verbal attack? Do we take the passive-aggressive course of the silent treatment? Or do we let them off the hook.

Anger builds through false narratives we tell ourselves. Here are a few of these narratives. See if any of them sound familiar.

- I am alone
- Things always have to go as I want them
- Something terrible will happen if I make a mistake
- I must be in control all of the time
- Life must always be fair and just
- I need to anticipate everything that will happen to me today
- I need to be perfect all the time.

Each of these narratives is full of fear, full of the need to be in control. We have a tendency to address the problem of fear with the solution of being in control.

When our false narratives seem to become a reality, anger can raise its ugly head.

Jesus takes the commandment "Do Not Kill" and extends it in two ways. First by extending a fence around anger. If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement. The Greek word for anger used here is *orgizo*. It's a very intense term. It refers to anger that is a prelude to destructive behavior. It is different from another term for anger "thumos"

2nd century Christian philosopher Origen said “Thumos differs from orge in that thumos is anger rising in vapor and burning up, while orge is a yearning for revenge.

Jesus doesn't leave us at just anger. He extends one other way. He puts a fence around hateful verbal expressions. “If you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool” you will be liable to the hell of fire.

With this final fence in place, Jesus covers the full circuit that leads one to seek another's life. The way Jesus saw it, anger progresses from emotion to verbal expression, to more hateful verbal expression. We see that far to often today.

The choice of the word “fool” here. The Greek word used is hraka. It means empty-headed. It's like us today saying “idiot” or “dimwit”. I just saw some of you, mentally picturing someone.

Jesus is talking about insulting the intelligence of someone who is the target of our anger. It is meant to shame that person. To make them feel dumb and stupid.

In Jesus time calling someone a fool was more than just an insult. A fool was someone who was unregenerate, unsaved, fit for eternal judgment. Calling someone a fool was grounds for being brought before the Sanhedrin the council, because the accused was charged with disputing their brother's salvation out of personal anger. It was considered a capital crime. Worthy of not just a death penalty, but of an eternal judgment. It was the acknowledgement that such hatred could be a prelude to murder.

Jesus seems to make a very extreme statement in talking about the punishment for someone who calls a brother or sister a fool. He says they will be liable to the “hell of fire”.

Is Jesus really referring to hell? The fiery Dante's Inferno version of Hell? This would not be consistent with the beliefs of Jewish Rabbis or Jesus at this time. The Old Testament doesn't give an explicit view of what the afterlife looks like. It speaks of Sheol, a place where all dead went. Not just those who cared for others, but those who cared for themselves.

The idea of a place of eternal torment came into play from the Persian, Greek, and Roman Influences and in Jesus' time wasn't a common topic of conversation in the synagogues. Because their focus was on the Torah and the prophets, places where any references to the afterlife just don't come up.

Later in Matthew Jesus will say this in chapter 10:28 "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body". As far as Jesus was concerned, the worst punishment for calling someone a fool would be annihilation or oblivion. Lost to memory.

We get it. It's not enough to say thou shalt not kill. We need to work to resolve issues that cause anger. We need to work to avoid insults. But that's easier said than done. We still have fears. We still believe that control is the solution to those fears. What are we to do?

What if we countered those false narratives from earlier with kingdom of Heaven Narratives.

- We say "I am alone" The Kingdom of Heaven says, "You are never alone, Jesus is always with you."
- We say, "Things always have to go as I want them to" and we hear from heaven "Jesus is in control"
- To our statement, "Something terrible will happen if I make a mistake" Jesus counters with "Mistakes happen all of the time and things usually work out fine."
- When we say, "Life must always be fair and just" The Kingdom of Heaven says. "Life is not always fair and just, but God gets the last word."
- And when we say, "I need to be perfect all the time." Jesus says, "I accept you, even though you are not perfect."

Yes, there are times when anger is not just ok, but necessary. After all, anger is what created Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Anger can lead to constructive and positive change.

But make no mistake, Jesus is warning us that there is a connection between anger and murder. There is a connection between name-calling and death.

I remember at Intuit. I was really mad about a project I was a part of. I was a small fish on this project, but I had customer insight into the issue. Nobody seemed to be caring about how seriously it was affecting customers. Not enough to have my sense of urgency. So, I was going to show them. I was going to write up the most blistering email ever and send it to all of them. They were going to know how stupid they were being on this issue. I decided to talk to a friend of mine in a different department who I'd worked with before. I shared my frustration. I also shared my genius idea to send my blistering email. She encouraged me to write it exactly as I had described. But then she said let it sit til morning. Boy did I go back, and I wrote the magna carta of emails. But then I did as she said and waited til morning. The next day I did one more pass through it. Oh, how unhelpful it was going to be. It was going to make a statement, but not one that would bring people along side me. I abandoned the email. Had more conversations and eventually started getting people to look at the issue more seriously. Perhaps later than I would have liked, but eventually we were able to fix this issue.

Name calling hurts. Words can hurt, words can kill. So can we take Do not Kill to a place where it will never see the light of day. That comes from managing anger and laying down the words that can kill.