

Session 4

December 27, 2020

REDIRECTING ANGER

Psalm 35:1-3,13-18

Anger in itself is a legitimate, God-given emotion. Even God gets angry. But His anger is *righteous*. We see the anger of holy God when His inherent righteousness is offended and violated by sin. So our anger may be justified if we are angry over those same offenses. But let's face it: most of our anger is more *human* than godly. James says, "Man's anger does not accomplish God's righteousness." We are much more selfish. We get angry when we are attacked, or our personal pride is hurt. And this selfish anger can be incredibly destructive. For this reason, Paul said, "Be angry [but] do not sin," and "Don't let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph 4:26). If ever there was a time for believers to seek God's guidance and His wisdom in dealing with our emotions, it's when we are really ticked off! David the psalmist knows all about it and offers some help.

Step #1: Make sure God is on your side (vv. 1-3). The psalm begins with the plea that God would demonstrate His support. The initial phrase is legal; it involves God *testifying* on David's behalf against his enemies (v. 1). But verses 2 and 3 shift to military terms; they involve *fighting* on David's behalf. Verse 2 is *defensive*; it describes two shields carried into battle. The smaller was used to deflect sword blows while the larger protected the entire body from incoming arrows. Verse 3 is *offensive*; David is suggesting that the Lord actively engage their common enemy with a spear and javelin in an act of ultimate deliverance. In the early stages of this psalm, David is lashing out. And his desire is that the Lord would come through and destroy his enemies. This only works, of course, when you are on God's side...and He is on yours. For reflection: *How many times have you wished God would strike somebody with fiery condemnation...only to realize that maybe you were on the wrong side of the argument? What then is the proper reaction?*

Step #2: Love others, regardless of how they treat you (vv. 13-16). In this section, David reflects on how unfair he is being treated. Some of the language indicates familiarity; that David had had previous and friendly dealings with those who now turned against him. In his anger, he is quick to point out how much better a person he was than those attacking him. When they were suffering illness, he was empathetic; humbling himself, fasting, and genuinely praying for them (v. 13). When they were suffering loss, he shared in their grief and mourned as though he had lost his own mother (v. 14). Ah...but when it was *his* turn to suffer, they scorned him with laughter and glee! (v. 15) "Assailants I did not know," is probably better translated as "assailants for reasons unknown" continued attacking and would not stop (v. 15). Adding to the pain was the godless verbal assault that "viciously chewed him up" (v. 16). For reflection: *How much of David's rant do you think was legitimate? How often do we compare ourselves to others when we are under attack? And how often do we whine "It's not fair!" in the midst of criticism?*

Step #3: Turn your anger at others into recommitment to God (vv. 17-18). The entire 28-verse psalm ebbs and flows between David's resentment towards his attackers and his confidence in God as his deliverer. Verses 17 and 18 provide a good example of this. The Lord is both *aware* of the attack David is under, and *able* to deliver him from the attacks. David admits

his own life is dear to him, and he wants to keep it! (v. 17). When his deliverance is complete, David pledges to praise God publicly, both in the congregation of the faithful and among the masses (v. 18). For reflection: *How does suffering the attacks of others help us draw near to God? When under attack, do you tend to ask God for revenge, or for patience? How does our reaction to attack affect our testimony?*