

The Anger of Jesus  
*The Real Jesus: Emotional Life*  
By Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson

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**Bible Text:** Mark 3:1-6  
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**First Presbyterian Church**  
1324 Marion St  
Columbia, SC 29201

**Website:** [www.firstprescolumbia.org](http://www.firstprescolumbia.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/fpccolumbia](http://www.sermonaudio.com/fpccolumbia)

Our Scripture reading this morning from the gospel according to Mark chapter three and you will find this passage in the pew Bible page 838 and there should be a copy in the pew rack in front of you of the English Standard Version which we customarily use. And for our children who have their children's Bible, the passage is on page 1215. As you are turning there, let me remind you of our evening service here at six o'clock. If you are a visitor then this is very much the climax of our day. We have a well filled room for our evening services and wonderful opportunity to worship and for mutual encouragement with one another. And we are in the middle of a series of sermons on the book of Ezra, but we are taking a two week break from that for two sermons that we hope will be of special help to those who are not yet Christians or those, perhaps, with whom you have been speaking. And so tonight I am going to preach on the subject, "When all Roads lead to God." I would be surprised if you haven't heard somebody use that expression, when all roads lead to God. There is, of course, a very important sense in which all roads do lead to God. But that is not actually the greatest issue. And we have got to consider that tonight.

But this morning let's hear God's Word from Mark's gospel chapter three and the first six verses.

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.<sup>1</sup>

We are in the course of a short series of studies, September and October together, entitled, "The Real Jesus, the Emotional Life of our Savior." And we are doing this for

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 3:1-6.

the simple reason that unless we have a sense of that emotional life of Jesus, Jesus will, by and large, remain to us as a figure in a stained glass window. The New Testament and especially the gospels present to us a Jesus with emotions. And most of us in our experience find it very difficult to get to know somebody who never expresses any emotion. We want handles to hold on to. And if we are to get to know our Lord Jesus Christ, his emotions are handles for faith to hold on to. And we have thought, first of all, about Jesus' sense of surprise which is, itself, for many of us as Christians, surprising. We never expected that the Jesus of the gospels would be surprised. But his heavenly Father we saw surprised him by doing something in the life of a Roman centurion that nothing human could ever have prepared Jesus to expect. And he expressed amazement that here was a Roman centurion with greater faith than anyone he had seen in Israel.

And then we moved on to everybody's favorite, Jesus' compassion, the wonder of his tenderness of spirit and heart to those who are in need.

But today Jesus gets angry. Anger, of course, is a deep emotional expression of antagonism and opposition. Somebody has described it as the gunpowder of the soul. And I think that for inevitably I find myself asking and you may also find yourself asking with me: Do I believe in a Jesus who got angry? Do I believe in a Jesus who might get angry again? And here rather obviously in the statement that Mark makes very specific as Jesus surveyed the scene in the synagogue at Capernaum where he was, he looked around them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.

There are actually several occasions in the gospels where Jesus seems to have expressed different kinds of anger. Perhaps the best known one is, of course, when his disciples tried to stop the parents bringing their young children to the Lord Jesus. Perhaps because they thought he was too important and they were too unimportant, he was too busy or they were too important. And you remember that Jesus was angry. He was angry with an indignation. And most of us want to stand up and cheer Jesus, don't we? How dare they keep little children from meeting Jesus. And then sometimes we swallow hard and realize what we have just said, because we, ourselves, have often been like the disciples and kept little children from meeting Jesus.

So Jesus' indignation or here even stronger language it would seem, Jesus' anger is, perhaps, for you one of the more difficult emotions in Jesus to be able to handle. But at the end of the day you can't pick and choose your own Jesus. That would make him a figment of my imagination. I like the idea of a compassionate Jesus, but I will do without a Jesus whoever got angry. But that would be making up your own Jesus. And at the end of the day your own Jesus is not the Jesus you need. My own Jesus is not the Jesus I need.

And so as we move into this, I want us to do it somewhat slowly because it is so important that we grasp, I think, in the first instance, in this passage, the significance of the context in which it is set. Sometimes when you and I get angry there is just a total explosion and the people standing around are saying, "Now what on earth caused that?" But there is a context here. There is a build up here that helps to explain the particular

situation in which Jesus here gets angry because chapter two and chapter three of Mark's gospel are full of what we sometimes call conflict stories in which Jesus finds himself early in his ministry being opposed and opposed by a particular group of people, the Pharisees here. Earlier on in chapter two he had gloriously healed a paralyzed man and they had snidely remarked that he was committing blasphemy. And then one of my own favorite stories in the gospels—this may tell you more about me than it does about the gospel story—the disciples are walking through the fields on a Saturday afternoon, the equivalent of our Sunday afternoon and they are doing what you do when you walk in the country. You see a few berries or you see the corn or whatever it is and unthinkingly they pick some of it up and start munching it. It is the kind of thing you do naturally. Suddenly a whole band of Pharisees jump up from without the sheaves and, “Ah ha, caught you. How dare you break the sabbath by reaping and grinding on the sabbath day?”

Of course, they don't say anything about Jesus directly, but, of course, people never do, do they? They point the finger at the disciples, but the innuendo is: You are responsible for these guys. You are a sabbath breaker.

I was once—it may be of interest to you—accused in seminary in which I taught by a student from another part of the world of being a sabbath breaker because I referred to Jack Nicholas in the course of one of my lectures and found myself guilty by association in all kinds of ways. Churches have people I call pouncers, you know. And it was so in the church to which the Lord Jesus belonged.

And the Pharisees, as we know, were a ... they were a conservative group of people. Their driving passion was to protect their religion from the incursions of the secular world. The Jews had been an oppressed and marginalized people by empire after empire and there had been all kinds of concessions, you know, to the modern world. We can't live in the old way that God determined in the modern world. We have got to compromise. And the Pharisees were the people who said, “Enough is enough.” And so they determined that there would be certain fixed points in their lives on which they would never compromise. And among these were the principle of the kosher food laws and it seems in their giving they tithed. If you remember the story that Jesus told of the Pharisee and the publican, you can't read that story as a minister or as an elder in a church without having a sneaking feeling it would be terrific to have a congregation full of Pharisees, because the church budget would just go through the roof. And, of course, the other thing that was such a big marker in their lives was the way in which they kept the sabbath day. And they were so committed to this that they would die rather than yield these points. And some of them actually did die.

Not all of them, as a matter of fact, were the nasties like this group. Nicodemus, for example, came to Jesus by night. He was a Pharisee and said, “Jesus, we know that you are a teacher sent from God. I want to understand you better.” But these particular Pharisees of whom we read dominantly in the gospels were men who were so rigorously committed in this instance to the sabbath day and sabbath observance that one of the things that made them profoundly suspicious about the Lord Jesus is that he taught so infrequently about the law of God. He hardly ever seemed to mention the law of God. He

spoke about it, if he spoke about it, as being fulfilled in him and how his own disciples actually had a righteousness that was superior to the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. And here they were on the sabbath day in the synagogue.

I once, years ago, went to speak at a conference. The subject I had been asked to speak on was a slightly controversial subject at that time. I went to the conference. I had been at this conference before and as soon as I arrived at the conference I thought, there are too many people here. I know the number of people who are prepared to come and listen to me at conferences. And I knew there were too many people there. And I thought, I think there are spies here. And, interestingly, I discovered, within a week from thousands of miles away, the other part of the world, that I had been absolutely right. There had been spies there. And when there are people with the spying spirit you can usually feel it in the very atmosphere of an occasion like this.

I think this must have been one of the most claustrophobic experiences of Jesus' early ministry as he casually goes to the synagogue on the sabbath day and perhaps thinks to himself there are too many people here. Oh, now I understand. They are here. The spies are here. The opponents are here. And he sees the man with the withered hand of whom we read. Had his presence been engineered? He is in the synagogue this Saturday and Jesus clearly thinks, now I understand.

So what does he do? Do you know the first thing he does is this? He embarrasses the man with the withered hand. There they are in the synagogue. The prying eyes, the excited people. You know how excited we get when we know there is going to be a fight. The people were excited. Something special was going to happen in the synagogue this particular Saturday. And the first thing Jesus does is he embarrasses the man with the withered hand.

How do I know that? I know that because I have known people with withered hands. They sit in particular places in churches. They deport themselves in particular ways. They are actually sometimes known as ... I can't remember what his name is, but he is the man with the withered hand.

And Jesus says in the middle of the service, "I would like the man with the withered hand to come and stand in the center of the synagogue." It is dramatic beyond words. What I want you to notice in passing is this, that Jesus does do this kind of thing. A couple of chapters later on he will actually do it again. Remember the woman who touched the hem of his garment and was instantaneously healed? She could have gone home and she would have been as well as ever a woman could be. She had been suffering for years and years. And she would have been beautifully transformed just by touching the hem of Jesus' robe. But actually Jesus stopped and embarrassed her, called her out of the crowd, because he wanted her to understand that it wasn't the magic in the hem of his robe, but the power of his saving grace on which she had tightly, if not all together, fully understandingly held that had brought her this salvation, that wholeness, the healing of her body. And there is a great lesson for us here, because if you are a Christian you will discover this if you have not discovered it already, that there are times when Jesus will

have you embarrassed. It is not actually possible to be a Christian, I don't think in this kind of society and not to find yourself in a situation of embarrassment because of the Lord Jesus. What I want you to notice is that the Lord Jesus never does this kind of thing without planning great good through the embarrassment, in a sense, greater good through the embarrassment that you could ever have tasted without it.

And so this is a clash between men who are hostile to the Lord Jesus and in the midst of it the thing that is so beautiful and the thing that by his Spirit he begins to impart to us is the sheer poise of the Lord Jesus as he calls the man into the middle of the room and then people begin to hold their breath.

I want you to think now not just about the general significance of the context, but to focus with me for a moment on the critical attitude of the Pharisees, because what is going on here is that the Pharisees who have so committed themselves to careful sabbath observance have asked the kind of question that people tend to do. Now Christians, I find, tend to ask this from time to time about Sundays. Well, what should we do on Sunday? What is the appropriate thing to do on Sunday? And the Pharisees would have been able to tell you exactly what would have been appropriate. And what the issue here is is that engaging in the practice of medicine, which is work, would be inappropriate.

Now, of course, there would be exceptions. You can't stop a baby being born on Saturday afternoon. There would be other exceptions if somebody had particular symptoms that would be suspiciously serious. Then in order to save life you could practice medicine. But a man with a withered hand was a man with a withered hand on Friday and he would be a man with a withered hand on Sunday. So you can sort him on Sunday if you are capable of sorting them, but do not transgress the Pharisees' interpretation of the sabbath law by healing this man on Saturday. And everybody in the room knows that this is the issue. The man knows this is the issue. The congregation knows this is the issue. Jesus knows this is the issue. How deeply offensive it is going to be to these Pharisees if Jesus heals this man on Saturday.

Now here is something that this is ... you know, do you think Jesus is an idiot? He doesn't understand what is going on. Do you notice whether does? He heals him without actually breaking the Pharisees' interpretation of the law. There is nothing against speaking. And that is all he does. He doesn't even touch him. He just says, "Stretch out your hand." Even in the Pharisees' law code there is no law against speaking. All he is asking the man to do is to shake his hand.

But what is the real issue here? Well, Jesus pinpoints it, doesn't he, in verse four. Jesus said to them:

"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?"<sup>2</sup>

Now they are there asking the question: Is Jesus going to break the sabbath or their interpretation of the sabbath? As I have sometimes said to you there is this neat way of

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 3:4.

speaking in the Jewish world. Why do rabbis always answer questions with questions? And the answer is, why not? And that is what Jesus is doing here. He is answering their questions—Are you going to heal?—with his question. And his question is this. He says, verse four:

“Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?”<sup>3</sup>

Now, actually, if you think about it, that isn't really enormously convincing. I think most of our lawyers would be saying, “Now wait a minute here.” I am sure all of the Pharisees would be saying that we are not doing him harm. We are not killing him. But, you see, Jesus wasn't really speaking about the man with the withered hand. He was speaking about them. It wasn't questions about the sabbath that he was talking about. It was questions about their heart. And one of the reasons we know that is true is in verse six. Immediately the Pharisees went out. They held counsel with the Herodians against Jesus how to destroy him.

Do you see what he is doing? He is doing the thing that we hate Jesus doing. He is exposing their hearts. He is saying, “You are here and you are saying to me, ‘Don't you dare heal this man on the sabbath day, because you shouldn't do this on the sabbath day.’” And he is saying, “So is it better to heal or to harm, to save life or to kill, because that is actually what you are here about. You actually have no interest in this man. They had no interest whatsoever in this man. Their interest was sharply becoming the interest. How could they get Jesus out of their vicinity, out of their lives, out of their synagogue and out of this world? So there is a general context. There is a critical attitude and this is why it leads to this reaction of anger in the Savior, verse five.

Jesus, as they were silent in their guilty silence, Jesus looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart. There was something in his face, perhaps something in the way he spoke that told the disciples that there was an emotion coming to expression in Jesus that they rarely saw. It was an emotion of deep hostility, of profound anger in the context of what these Pharisees were doing. And Mark explains it to us. He says Jesus was grieved at their hardness of heart.

It is interesting. The New Testament uses more than one kind of expression to describe hardness of heart and the vocabulary the New Testament uses has come into the vocabulary of our doctors. The particular vocabulary that is used here conveys the idea of a heart that has become calloused. There is a protective, hard surface against the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And it is not difficult to see how that hardness developed. You know, you shake hands with somebody who is doing an office job and ... or a minister, you know, even hands of this age can feel quite soft, but you shake hands with a farm worker or a wood worker. Then what do you feel? You feel the hardness of the skin, the constant use and the hardness of the skin, the calluses that build up.

And through some kind of exercise of heart, these calluses had been created in these Pharisees' lives. And what is so fascinating is what had created those calluses was their

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

response to the Lord Jesus. In the previous couple of chapters whenever he had been in this region he had shown that the kingdom of God had come, that he King had arrived and that the kingdom was a kingdom of gracious restoration and life transformation and joy and privilege. And as they had seen it strangely they had resisted it and the more they had seen it and heard of it, the more they resisted it and the friction between their hearts and the grace and glory of the kingdom of Jesus and the person of Jesus, the more they found themselves in friction, the harder their hearts became. And now their hearts were so hard they were determined to be rid of the Lord Jesus.

I have always been intrigued by the fact that in the parable that Mark records in the next chapter of the sower and the soils, you remember the seed of the Word falls in different kind of soil, that the first path on which the seed falls is the pathway and actually the pathway was the part that the farmer was walking on so frequently.

That is one of the horrific things about being a preacher of the gospel. You know that the more you preach it the more some hearts are going to be hardened against it, because if Christ will not soften my heart and transform my heart and fill my heart with joy, then the friction of that message of grace that I resist produces in me a heart callousness and this is what had developed in these Pharisees for all their zeal, for all their conservative character, for all their commitment to things that seem to be so good, the real test of their heart condition was actually how they responded to Jesus. That was the heart test. Jesus was giving them the ultimate heart test by displaying again and again the grace and power and transformation of the gospel and they were saying, again and again, "I won't have it."

And you see what the result was and what made Jesus angry. It was that they ended up divorcing the laws of God from the gracious character and purpose of God. Just at the end of the previous chapter Jesus had said, "Don't you understand from reading your Bible that the sabbath was made as a gift for man? Man wasn't made to be squeezed into the sabbath. The sabbath was given to provide a gracious day in the week when hard working man could be free from the pressures of his work." And, you see, here is a man who perhaps wasn't able to work the other six days of the week. Here is a man who must have found it difficult to hold down a job.

I saw something in the news a few weeks ago of a man somewhere in rural China who had made his own artificial limb and it was about 30 times as heavy as an artificial limb would be here and the sheer energy, the exhaustion of this poor man who was trying to eke out a living and this is this man here. And they have got their laws. And, you see, they not only divorced God's gracious character and purpose from their understanding of his laws, but you notice what they do. Do you see the echo here of what happened in the garden of Eden when God said to Adam and Eve, "This is a terrific garden and it is all your. Enjoy it. But there is one thing. Don't eat of that particular tree in the middle of the garden that we will call the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Just enjoy the rest."

And the serpent comes along and he says, "Has God set you in this garden with all these trees and said you are not to eat of the fruit of any of these trees?"

You see what he is doing? God had given a command in relationship to the trees. Go and enjoy yourselves. But be obedient to me. And Satan, like these Pharisees or, better, these Pharisees like Satan had turned God's generosity and liberality and graciousness into restrictiveness that inevitably meant that the God of whom they thought was as restricted in mind and spirit as they were restricted and therefore he was utterly unlike Jesus. And at the end of the day, what their hearts were saying was this. It is either our God or him as God. And despite all the overtures of grace, they refused him.

Perhaps some of you who are physicians have come home to your wife one day and she said, "Honey, how was it today?" And it has just kind of blown up. Mr. so and so. I have been telling him now for years that unless he does this he is going to die. And today after I looked at the x-rays and had the tests run, I had to tell him, "You are own going to die." And I am so grieved. I am angry about what has happened, because he had all the counsel he needed, all the opportunity he needed, all the provision I would have given him, all the help that I pledged to him. And that is what the Pharisees had done. Over a period of weeks, perhaps over a period of months every single move the Savior had taken was a move of grace. Every word he spoke the people were amazed at the gracious words that proceeded from his mouth. Everything he did had this heavenly sense of the transforming power of the gospel that he preached and all the time they hardened their hearts.

I remember hearing of the great Welsh preacher John Elias going in the old days when you took your BMW horse to the blacksmith rather than to the auto dealer and he took his horse, his one horse power auto to the blacksmith for the blacksmith to put a new horseshoe on his horse. And there was this howling as he approached the blacksmith shop, as the blacksmith banged on his anvil, howl, howl. And when he got there he realized the blacksmith had got a new dog. And a couple of weeks later he would go back to his blacksmith for another shoe and he heard the banging of the blacksmith on the anvil and then when he went into the room the dog was lying beside the anvil fast asleep. That is how it goes.

The tragedy of the situation is the thing in which we tend most to rejoice when God's Word penetrates into the conscience—and this was what was happening here. Jesus was such a conscience penetrating presence and teacher of the gospel and the thing that happens is that people just feel so relieved it is not touching their conscience. So they can be happy and they don't realize that Jesus has stopped speaking to them.

And so they went out and sought to rid their lives of Jesus. And the tragedy is that the frown they must have seen on the face of the great physician did to move them to seek healing at his hands.

When did the Lord last speak to you? Was there friction? My friends, as we look at this very challenging fault of Jesus being angry, if we sense his frown, let us run to his grace. And if you hear his voice, as the Scripture says, do not harden your heart.



*Lord Jesus, we stand amazed in your presence as you walk off the pages of Scripture and show us your majesty and your poise, your glory and, yes, as you show us your anger, we pray that whenever you frown upon our lives because we are resisting you that we may have sufficient sensitivity of heart to turn to you and we look to you today and cry to you to continue to speak to us that we may not drift and eventually become deaf. So hear us. Thank you that you have come. Thank you for all that it must have meant to that man with the withered hand to spend the rest of his life even among people who couldn't remember his name being described as the man who had the withered hand whom Jesus healed. Lord, whatever our pasts have been, however we have sinned and failed, we pray we may be those whom Jesus has healed. And we pray it in his name.*