

Sermon: “The Curse of the Grudgeon”

Overview:

Most of you by now have seen the emphasis that our church places upon authentic, Spirit filled worship. Our Worship Team’s dedication, our devotion to prayer and preparation for each service stand as testimonies to the priority of worship in our church and in your life.

Over the past few weeks, you have heard testimony after testimony from people in our congregation who have had significant worship encounters with God. They have shared with us some of those powerful encounters they have had with His glory. Many of these people have had life-transforming experiences, which are the fruit of an authentic worship experience with God.

But I know there are some of us here who come to our church, and week after week, you leave the same way you came in here. You might even say to yourself, “I liked those songs,” or “that was an inspiring or interesting sermon.” But the testimonies of these folks has made you uncomfortable. You wonder what they are all worked up about. You cannot imagine what they have experienced...in fact, it seems as remote of a possibility in your life as the planet Mars is from us.

But God’s plan is for every Christian to experience Christ in such a life-transforming way that you cannot help but to weep, fall down in worship, and worship in exuberance. The question you and I must answer today, is why more of us are not experiencing God in this vital and powerful way...or at least, not more often.

1. **We don’t experience authentic worship because something is between us and God.**
 - a. What is holding you back? I can say from experience, that most of us aren’t even conscious about what we are withholding from God that prevents us from worshipping Him as He intended.
 - b. Jesus spells out one of the major barriers for us in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5, verses 21-26. He is telling this at the scene of the sermon on the mount, to a crowd of Jews who thought they understood worship.
 - c. *"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell. "So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. Come to terms quickly with your enemy before it is too late and you are dragged into court, handed over to an officer, and thrown in jail. I assure you that you won't be free again until you have paid the last penny.*
 - d. Did you hear what Jesus just said about worship?

- i. In verses 23-24, *"So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God."*
- ii. Jesus says here that worship is a worthless and meaningless religious exercise if you have any separation between you and a brother or sister in the family of faith.
 1. Ouch.
- iii. Let me paint the picture even more vividly.
 1. The Jews had to travel all the way to Jerusalem to worship, many times dragging a goat or sheep with them. This journey took 2-3 days for many Jews, and then they would stand in line all day long, waiting for their turn to make their offering.
 2. Now, you hear what Jesus is saying to you.
 - a. If you remember...
 - i. If your heart is right before God, you will reflect on your heart's attitudes toward God and others as an act of worship preparation
 - ii. Do any of us prepare for worship by asking God to reveal to us the sin in our lives and the separation between us and others?
 - iii. Authentic worship requires this!
 - b. So this good Jewish man or woman, who has made this lengthy trip to Jerusalem and stood in line for hours, REMEMBERS that he has an offence against someone or that someone has an offence against him, he is to give up his place in line, travel the journey back to his home, settle with the one who he has differences, and THEN come back and offer his act of worship.
 - c. To the Jewish man or woman, this had to sound unbelievably extreme.
 - i. This would be like you or I being on vacation in Florida, and going to church on Sunday, and once there, discovering we had an offense with someone. So, we get in our car and drive all the way back to Ohio to settle accounts with the person we have had a problem with. Then driving all the way back to Florida to go back and rejoin the worship service.
 - d. Jesus was making one of the most critical points he would make beside the cross he would suffer.
 - e. **The approach to God can be blocked by offenses between us and others.**
 - f. And to attempt to approach God without dealing with these offences is an exercise in futility.
 - g. Jesus tells us it is a waste of our time to think we can worship God with an offense blocking the road.

2. What are these “offenses” that separate us from others and God?
 - a. You might remember the skit that Susie, Kristina and Andy performed for us this morning. The “Livid Log Book” was a record of wrongs between the parties.
 - b. What is in your Livid Log Book? It all starts with Anger.

3. Anger:
 - a. Anger is a divinely implanted emotion.
 - i. It is allied to our instinct for righteousness and justice. It was designed for constructive spiritual purposes. It is a powerful emotion that produces energy in us.
 1. A person who cannot feel anger at evil cannot feel enthusiasm for good. If you cannot hate evil, then it is questionable if you can love righteousness.
 - ii. . Anger is a self-preservation response to the perception of being wronged.
 - iii. We direct our anger at other people or at ourselves when we perceive pain.
 - iv.

4. Grudges: “un-forgiven and un-forgotten” offenses.
 - i. The Hebrew word for Grudge means to “lodge, stop over, or pass the night”
 1. The bible tells us in Ephesians 4:26-27 to “*Be angry but do not sin;*” and furthermore, “*do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity (or a foothold).*”
 2. Sin occurs when anger is allowed to boil and simmer and brew, getting stronger with every passing day.
 - a. If it’s fire is not put out, it will rule us.
 - b. It will begin to control us.
 - c. It will destroy us.
 3. God knows how we are designed.
 4. He knows that anger, if allowed to simmer, will provide a foothold in our lives.
 5. It is very similar to allowing an enemy to get past the threshold of our will (recall last week).
 - a. Once inside, the enemy has a foothold or a base to begin his operations of destruction in our lives.
 - b. Every invading army has to set up a base of operations within the territory they are invading.
 - c. Satan wants to destroy you. He will seek to use anger and as a tool to do so.
 - ii. The Greek word for Grudge means to “hold, be held, be ensnared or entangled.”
 - iii. Grudges are best evidenced by the act of murmuring (see Jn 7:12, Acts 6:1, 1 Peter 4:9).
 1. In fact, the King James Version translated the word for grudge as “to murmur.”
 - iv. A grudge is a resentment that builds up inside of us.

1. It is like a glue that sticks their offense against us to them. Whenever we see them or hear their name, we think about what they did or said to us. We relive the experience over again.
 - v. **A grudge keeps a record of wrongs.** It has no eraser. We might even forgive, but we refuse to forget.
 - vi. **A grudge is easily angered.** The reason is, it keeps a record of wrongs. Compare this to 1 Corinthians 13:5 “**Love is not easily angered (because) it keeps no record of wrongs.**”
 - vii. **A grudge rejoices when the offender fails or falls.** Unfortunately, when we keep a grudge, we are secretly hoping that the other person will experience pain in their life, and somehow their pain will be something like the pain they caused us. Compare this to 1 Corinthians 5:6, “**Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth.**”
- b. Offenses:
- i. What about them. What are they? Do I have them? Sure you do. We all do. They follow us like little puppies biting at our heels, even when we think we have gotten rid of them.
 1. Look at your bulletin insert.
 - a. I want to lead you through an exercise in “Remembering.”
 - b. In the corner of your insert, write down the dates of the most painful memories you have.
 - i. Just the year will do.
 - c. For most of us, it will be more than one date.
 - d. Most of us have some very painful experiences in life.
 - e. Some of us blame God for that pain.
 - f. Others of us know that others caused our pain.
 - g. No matter what, write down the date, even if you feel you have dealt with the offense.
 - ii. Illustration of my pain:
 1. Most of my pain I recall are from three time periods in my life:
 - a. High School (can’t do a lot about that one)
 - b. Job Loss while in Seminary (got pretty mad at the character that fired me; only ever got over it when I saw God’s hand in it and realized that what man meant for evil, God meant for good.)
 - c. Ministry ending in Massachusetts – (ah, there is one I am still dealing with). Again, I see God’s hand in it and know that what man did in evil intentions, God is using for good.
 - i. But...
 - d. I know a grudge is there. You know how?
 - e. Ask yourself a question.

- i. Would you willingly go back to that time and look at the person who hurt you look them in the eye with tenderness and understanding?
 - ii. Would you willingly go back to that time period and spend time with those who hurt you?
 - f. Jennifer asked me that question not long ago, as we are getting ready to go to Texas for Thanksgiving. I am looking forward to that. We have friends there that we will always love and be close to.
 - g. But she asked me...would you ever like to go back to Massachusetts to visit?
 - i. Tell about the newsletter we found from GBC that had my departure announcement in it
 - h. The Holy Spirit got me on that one. I had to say “No.” It is too painful. Even though there are many people I love there, I don’t know if I could look in the eyes of those who hurt me and be genuinely loving toward them.
 - i. I know this because in the months before we moved, I had to spend time with them, and I did a good cover up job. I was cordial. I didn’t murmur. I didn’t rage at them. I stuffed it inside.
 - ii. And I still relive the pain every time I picture them in my mind.
 - iii. This means that the offense may be forgiven, or in the process of forgiveness, but it is not forgotten and it is not restored.

5. The solution:

a. **Be Slow to Anger.**

- i. James 1:19-20 *“This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”*
 - 1. There are two types of anger.
 - a. Thumos – it is how a campfire is started. Kindling and dried leaves flare up but burn off quickly, dying down quickly as well. It could be equated to an anger that rises up in offense but quickly settles.
 - i. This type of anger is not the anger that Jesus spoke about in his sermon on the mount.
 - ii. But before you think, “well that gets me off the hook” you have to realize that the problem with offenses isn’t just about who has made you made. It can be also about who you offend as well.

- iii. The explosive (but short-lived anger) meets your need to “blow off steam” and you feel normal afterwards.
- iv. But others around you, those who were the target of your anger, they are the ones who now have an offense...with you! You have just wounded them!
- v. A woman once came to the great preacher Billy Sunday and tried to rationalize her angry outburst. “there is nothing wrong with losing my temper. I blow up and then its all over.” Bill replied, “So does a shotgun, and look at the damage it leaves behind.”
- vi. Maybe you are like that lady, thinking that you don’t have any offenses...but you might need to look again. Jesus included anyone with an offense...you against them or them against you in this need to restore your relationships.
- vii. You won’t ever get control of your anger on your own.
 - 1. If you have the Thumos type of anger, there is an offense hidden deep in your life that you need to uproot.
 - 2. There is a pain that is hidden even from your consciousness that is burning up your insides.
 - 3. Won’t you ask God today to show you what it is?
- b. The second type of anger is the word “orga.” This is the word Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount.
 - i. This is where the word “orgy” comes from.
 - ii. It means “temporary madness.”
 - iii. It is a simmering, persistent anger that is nursed to keep it warm.
 - iv. It is one that is fed by the memories of the pain you suffered.
 - v. It leads directly to death, because at its heart is ‘hatred.’
- c. Jesus uses the present tense participle to describe this anger that we see. It is not a “moment of anger” like someone who “gets angry,” but rather it is a PORTABLE type of anger that is carried around, and becomes a resentment that eats away your heart.

b. Do not Sin

- i. None of us can control the circumstances affecting our lives. So many tragedies occur in this world, and we really have very little control over what happens to us.
- ii. In fact, the only thing you and I have control over is our response to our circumstances.
- iii. We are no longer slaves to our bodies or our old natures, so that when our “buttons are pushed” we are under NO obligation to respond in a way that is contrary to the scripture.
- iv. When we are wronged, we have a choice on how we respond.
 - 1. John was 14 and had plans for the weekend. His parents came to him on Friday and reminded him that they had a family reunion to go to on Saturday. John got

very angry. He didn't want to go. He had plans. Now his parents were making him do something he didn't want to do. His plans were ruined.

- a. So he went to the reunion and picnic and didn't play the family softball game.
 - b. He didn't mix or talk with his relatives.
 - c. He sulked at a table and demanded to be left alone.
 - d. John was offended by the actions of his parent.
 - e. And John responded by sinning, he allowed his heart and mind to become bitter toward his parents and relatives. He was unkind to others as a result. He nurtured and fed his bitter spirit. He developed a grudge that would affect his relationships with his parents for years to come.
2. John didn't have a choice in the weekend about where he would spend it. But he had a choice on how to respond to the circumstances.
 3. You and I have a choice.
 4. Life is not fair.
- v. But you get to choose what you will do when life hurts.

c. **Forgive as You have been Forgiven**

i. Matthew 18:21-35 tells us *“and in anger, the Lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do it to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”*

1. This is from a parable that Jesus tells of a man who is forgiven a great debt and who then proceeds to be unforgiving in his relationships to those who owe him small debts.
2. The parable is clear: God has forgiven you and I a great debt, a debt we could not pay.
 - a. The debt of our sin and offense against Him, is so large, we cannot pay it. Our debt is too great for us to pay..
 - b. Yet God has cancelled it. He forgave it. And He forgot it.
 - c. And in the same way, we are to forgive the “small by comparison” debts that others owe us.

ii. Ephesians 4:31-32 *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you , along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*

1. Now this is not the same as “stuffing it.”
 - a. Stuffing it or pretending nothing happened is not forgiveness.
 - b. Suppressed anger is not the same as forgiveness
 - c. We must acknowledge that we have been wronged. That is the first step in forgiving others.
 - i. Sometimes we think it is not Christian to be angry or to acknowledge that we have been hurt.
 - ii. But to deny that you have been hurt is like a person with a disease refusing to admit they are sick.
 - iii. Denial will not make it better, but worse.
 - iv. You must acknowledge that you have been hurt in order to enter into the process of forgiveness and healing.
2. We also must recognize what God forgave us of and compare the offense to us with what we have done to God, and His Son on the cross. “just as God in Christ has forgiven you.”
 - a. And we must realize that we don’t have the strength to forgive, that we need God’s power and strength to forgive.
 - i. The reason Jesus told Peter 70 x 7 times to forgive isn’t just because someone keeps on offending you, but also because the offense takes a long time to be erased from our mind.

- ii. We need to keep on returning to the cross to see what Jesus did for us.
 - iii. In so doing, our hearts will be turned to release the offender of the debt they owe us.
 - 3. Unforgiveness is the same demanding that a person pay a debt.
 - a. They owe us! Look what he or she did to me!
 - 4. But the prison that we build is one that we end up in, not them
- 6. Recap
 - a. Acknowledge the pain.
 - b. Recognize your debt to Christ.
 - c. Release the debt others owe you. Choose to cancel it.
 - d. Ask God to help you forgive.
 - e. Walk as if you have released them from your debt.
 - i. Now some of these things I have done with my pain. Yet, the memory of the offense rises again and again. And to the cross I go. Someday, God will ask me to face those who hurt me. And I will obey. And in obeying, the release will be complete.
- 7. Your response?
 - a. Who has God brought to your mind today...what pain have you felt and not dealt with?
 - b. Won't you be released from the curse of the grudgeon today?