Sermon Series: Words of Wisdom in a Whacked-Out World
Sermon Title: Keeping Your Cool

Text: Proverbs 14:29 -- Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly; Proverbs 16:32 -- Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city; Proverbs 29:11 -- A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

Introduction: Taylor Swift was quite the romantic when she burst on the scene in **2006**. She sang about the ecstasies of young love and the heartbreak of it. **But her mood has DEFINITELY hardened as her star has risen.** Her album, ***Midnights***, released in 2022, plays upon a string of negative emotions—**self-hatred, anxiety, restlessness, exhaustion, and occasionally anger**. It turns out Swift is part of a larger trend. ***Researchers analyzed more than 150,000 pop songs released between 1965 and 2015 and discovered that the use of the word "love" in top-100 hits was roughly cut by 50%***. Meanwhile, the number of times such songs contained negative-emotion words, like "**hate**," rose sharply. ***Pop music isn't the only thing that has gotten a lot harsher***. **Other researchers analyzed 23 million headlines published between 2000 and 2019 in the United States**. The headlines, too, grew significantly more negative, with a greater proportion of them denoting ANGER, FEAR, DISGUST, AND SADNESS. According to the **Global Peace Index**, civic discontent—riots, strikes, anti-government demonstrations—increased by 244 percent from 2011 to 2019. We live in a world of widening emotional inequality. ***The emotional health of the world is shattering***. (*David Brooks, "The Rising Tide of Global Sadness," New York Times (10-27-22)*. **I'M SURE THAT MOST OF THIS NEWS COMES AS NO SURPRISE TO MOST OF YOU.** Today, it seems like many people are living on the ragged edge between holding it together and coming apart. Virtually, every day we hear of another case of road rage or of a man or woman who went ballistic on some family members. The use of anger as an emotion to express ourselves has led us down all sorts of dangerous roads.

This morning, as we continue in our series, "**Words of Wisdom for a Whacked-Out (Crazy) World**", I want to look at what Solomon said about the use and abuse of anger by first talking about two very different expressions of anger, unrighteous and righteous anger.

UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER. Anger is an emotion given to us by God that can either serve a HOLY PURPOSE (after all, God feels indignation every day according to **Psalm 7:11**) **or an UNHOLY PURPOSE.** ***When it is justified, it is an expression of the righteousness of God*** as when Jesus overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the temple (**Matthew 21:12-13**). **Unfortunately, most of our anger as human beings is not of this variety. And when it erupts as the result of our SELF-CENTEREDNESS it is uncontrolled (Proverbs 29:11 – A fool gives full vent to his spirit), brings discord (Proverbs 15:18 – A quick-tempered man stirs up strife) and is counter to God's purposes (Proverbs 14:17 – People with a hot temper do foolish (perverse) things – Good News Translation)**. Occasionally, the consequences of out-of-control anger are difficult to repair. That's why we need to figure out how to deal with this emotion in a way that pleases God. Wrath can affect every important relationship we have ... **with God, others, and even ourselves**. HERE ARE THREE CONSEQUENCES OF UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER.

- **UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER BRINGS REGRET**. If you've lived for any amount of time, you know this is true. **Uncontrolled anger often leads us to do and say impulsive things that bring**

shame and personal pain to ourselves let alone others. Here are a couple of examples from Scripture of someone referred to in **Numbers 12:13** as "**very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.**" Yet, even he struggled with controlling his temper and was compelled to deal with the consequences.

- **Do you remember when Moses threw the 10 commandments to the ground (Exodus 32:15-20)**? After he spent forty days on Mount Moriah receiving the law **that God Himself had written on two stone tablets He had graciously provided for Moses**, his servant returned down the mountain to find the Israelites worshiping a golden calf. The Bible says, "**Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.**" Some have argued that he was displaying righteous indignation when he cast the ten commandments to the ground, but if that's the case, **why did God make him chisel out two more stone tablets like the first ones the next time He met with Moses on the mountain (Exodus 34)**? While his initial response to their idolatry was certainly appropriate, a flash of holy indignation, it seems that God wasn't too crazy about how Moses let his anger get the best of him and broke the tablets in the first place.
- **Moses struck the rock in the desert (Numbers 20:9-12)**. The Israelites liked to grumble and complain as they wandered about the desert. This time they voiced their displeasure about having no water to drink. It's interesting to note that at least twice before they had come to him with a similar concern and God had provided water on each occasion. Yet, this time they were certain they and their livestock were going to die. **When Moses went before the Lord, He instructed His servant to speak to a rock likely on which the cloud of God had recently rested and He would provide still again**. But Moses didn't follow his orders. "**Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels: shall WE bring water for you out of this rock?"** (SOUND LIKE THE WORDS OF AN ANGRY MAN TO YOU?) **And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them**"). And that is exactly what happened a little while later. Joshua led the people of God into the Promised Land while Moses could only peer at it from Mount Nebo before he died (**Exodus 34**). That must have been a hard pill to swallow! Yet he only had himself to blame. **WHAT ARE WE TO LEARN FROM THIS? Be very careful to control your anger. Even the best of us can be overcome by it, bringing great REGRET as a result.**

- **UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER BRINGS RAGE**. One of the ways you can translate a Hebrew word for anger is "**rage**" or "**wrath.**" In **Proverbs 15:1**, we're told, "**A soft answer turns away wrath** (rage)." The verb form of this word means "**to be fiery, to be hot.**" This kind of anger is often dangerous. It is often motivated by JEALOUSY of others. This seems to be the case in the following examples.
  - **Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4:3-8). This was the first act of violence recorded in the Bible.** Cain and Abel (two sons of Adam and Eve) brought offerings to the Lord, Cain from the fruit of the ground and Abel from the firstborn of his flock. God regarded the offering from Abel but not of his brother's. Likely God accepted the sacrifice of Abel because it flowed from an obedient and devoted heart (**to obey is better than to sacrifice – 1 Samuel**

15:22). This was not true of Cain and is why God said to him, **"Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." Because he was JEALOUS of his brother, Cain became HOT WITH ANGER. That's when he rose up against Abel and killed him.**

- **Saul tried to kill David (1 Samuel 18:5-11)**. David was a young man when he was requested by Saul to come and play the harp before him as a way to soothe his spirit. David quickly established himself as a fierce warrior in Israel, first defeating Goliath and then rallying the Israelites to defeat the Philistines. And, of course, the people noticed his success, especially as compared to that of Saul, so they proudly proclaimed, **"Saul has killed his thousands and David his tens of thousands."** It would take a pretty secure person to hear that from his subjects and be okay with it, and unfortunately, Saul was anything but secure. That's why he picked up a spear and threw it at David as he was playing his harp hoping to pin him to the wall. As king, he wanted all the glory for himself.

  Both Cain and Saul were filled with rage and jealousy and sought to kill their rivals, one successfully, the other barely missing. It turns out that humans aren't the only creations of God to demonstrate jealousy and rage. William Muir, a researcher at Purdue University, studies the productivity of chickens. He wants to know how to breed chickens that lay lots of eggs and create environments that foster greater productivity. To research how to make super chickens, he conducted an experiment. Muir put chickens into two groups. **One group** contained normal, healthy chickens. He left them alone for six generations of a chicken's life. **Another, separate group** included all the super chickens, those who are proven high-producing egg layers. Muir also left them alone for six generations. He provided food, water, and a clean environment, but did nothing to influence the chickens egg egg-laying. At the end of the experiment, Muir discovered that the group of normal chickens were flourishing: they were laying more eggs per chicken than when the experiment started. In the group of super chickens, only three were left. They had pecked the others to death. **It turns out that the super chickens laid more eggs through a strategy of suppressing other chickens' productivity by killing them. I guess even super chickens struggle with egos, wanting to outshine or should I say outproduce all their rivals!** JEALOUSY AND THE RAGE IT OFTEN INSPIRES ARE UGLY NO MATTER WHERE YOU FIND THEM. **(Review: Unrighteous anger brings REGRET and RAGE.)**

- **UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER BRINGS REBUKE**. There is One above all that is displeased with unrighteous anger. I'm talking about God. His desire for His children is that we do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with Him (**Micah 6:8**). **When we fail to do what is right, or withhold mercy, and live proudly, we can expect His correction. Proverbs 3:11-12** says, **"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves."** Precisely because God loves us, we can expect Him to rebuke any demonstration of inappropriate and unholy anger in our lives, even in the case of **a prophet or a pair of Jesus' disciples**.
  - **Jonah wanted God to destroy the Assyrians (Jonah 4:5-11)**. Jonah had a strong distaste for the people of Nineveh in particular and the Assyrians in general. When God called him to preach that if they did not repent in forty days, they would be overthrown, he wanted no part of it. That's why he got in a boat and went as far as he could in the opposite

direction. After God caused a great storm and Jonah was thrown into the sea to be swallowed by a fish of some size, he was spit out on dry ground and given a second chance. **This time, he obeyed and the people of Nineveh repented.** You would have thought that Jonah should have been happy about it, but he was not. The Bible says their response "**displeased Jonah and he was angry.**" In fact, he went as far as to say to God, "**That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?**" Now we know the right answer should have been "no", but it didn't change how Jonah felt. Eventually, he made his way outside the city and made a booth for himself. There he sat waiting to see what would happen. God caused a plant to grow up over the prophet to provide a little shade and then appointed a worm to attack it so that the plant withered while the sun beat down on him. And Jonah asked that he might die and said, "**It is better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." And the Lord said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left? God rebuked Jonah because he was angry about all the wrong things and needed to be corrected. He was more concerned about a plant that had sprouted up one day and died the next than he was about 120,000 people who were facing God's judgment. Though the text doesn't say that Jonah got the point, we can assume he did, since he authored the book! THAT'S THE BENEFIT OF A GOOD REBUKE.**

- **James and John wanted God to destroy the Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56).** Much the same way the Jews felt about the Assyrians in the Old Testament, they did not like Samaritans during New Testament times. When the people living in a Samaritan village would not let Jesus, who had set His face toward Jerusalem, and the twelve pass through their territory, James and John (called the Sons of Thunder) quickly volunteered to call down fire from heaven to destroy them. But Luke says that Jesus "**turned and rebuked them**". **The irony of this story is that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to give his life as a ransom for many, yet his disciples wanted to kill the people for whom He was preparing to die. THEY NEEDED TO BE SET STRAIGHT AND THAT'S JUST WHAT OUR LORD DID. (Review: Unrighteous anger brings REGRET, RAGE, and REBUKE.)**

RIGHTEOUS ANGER. We can know that our anger or indignation is righteous when it is directed toward WHAT angers God Himself. **Righteous anger and indignation are justly expressed when we encounter sin in the world and have a Spirit-filled response to it.** This is what we see from our Lord Jesus Christ.

- **His anger had the proper motivation**. In other words, He was angry for the right reasons. Jesus' anger did not arise from petty arguments or personal slights against Him. There was no selfishness involved.
- **His anger had the proper focus**. He was not angry at God or at the "weaknesses" of others. His anger targeted sinful behavior and true injustice.

- **His anger had the proper supplement**. Mark 3:5 says that His anger was attended by grief over the Pharisees' lack of faith. Jesus' anger stemmed from love for the Pharisees and concern for their spiritual condition. It had nothing to do with hatred or ill will.
- **His anger had the proper control**. Jesus was never out of control, even in His wrath. The temple leaders did not like His cleansing of the temple (**Luke 19:47**), but He had done nothing sinful. He controlled His emotions; His emotions did not control Him.
- **His anger had the proper duration**. He did not allow His anger to turn into bitterness; He did not hold grudges. He dealt with each situation properly, and He handled anger in good time.
- **His anger had the proper result**. Jesus' anger had the inevitable consequence of godly action. Jesus' anger, as with all His emotions, was held in check by the Word of God; thus, Jesus' response was always to accomplish God's will.

How to keep your cool:

- **Don't spend a lot of time with angry people – Proverbs 22:24-25 -- Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.**
- **Forgive those who anger you – Ephesians 4:26-27-- Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil; 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, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**
- **Be slow to anger -- Proverbs 14:29 – Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding; 16:32 – Who is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. You never know what someone might be going through.**

Conclusion: Heather Burke-Cody blogs: I was thrift shopping for dorm stuff. The cashier appeared to be one of the most unhappy, maddest people ever. I was six people deep in the line, and it seemed like she got more and more exasperated with each passing customer. She was especially incensed when one of my unmarked items needed a price check .... But as she rang up my items, I felt a ... soul nudge. I tried to bargain with Jesus and told him that the extra little bit of cash in the back side of my wallet was not meant for her. It surely should go to someone sweeter and kinder, more deserving, or at least appreciative maybe. Not someone downright mean and angry. But God did not budge. The human heart is our very best compass. It rarely leads us astray. So, I paid my bill and reluctantly found the backside of my wallet. I slipped her some cash as she handed me my receipt. She was caught off-guard by the gesture. She gripped the folded bill with one hand and paused. Then slid her mask down with the other hand. Her loud, stern voice got quiet when she whispered a single word: "***Why***?" To which I answered two words back: "***Soul nudge***." There was another pause. A brief reckoning of sorts. When she grabbed my hand and held on, I was the one caught off-guard. "***Today's my 75th birthday and ain't nobody called me. Not my sister. Not none of my kids. None of these people here. Nobody. Nothing. I don't think I can remember ever being so sad. Ain't nobody even remembers it's my birthday***."