

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Long Nostrils*
SERIES: *What's in a Name?*
SCRIPTURES: *Exodus 34:5-7*
SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*
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**Credit to "God Has A Name" (John Mark Comer); "Old Testament Word Studies" (William Wilson); Brian Zahnd (Sinners in the Hands of a loving God); John Ortberg; Tomas Christianson (Relevant Magazine Article)*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you.

We are in the third week of our sermon series... **(SERMON SERIES GRAPHIC)**...

"What's in a Name?"

We've turned to a popular passage of Scripture, found in Exodus 34...it's a conversation on Mount Sinai, between God and Moses, where God tells us who He is, what He's like.

And again, I'm indebted to author John Mark Comer for his great book, "God Has A Name"...in working our way through this passage of Scripture.

And I've put the challenge out there for our church to spend the next several weeks memorizing this passage...so let me just read it for us again and then we'll take a look, in detail, at one tiny little phrase...

Exodus 34:5-7 - ⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to

anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

This is who God is, this is what He's like.

The theologian AW Tozer has said, **“What you believe about God is the most important thing about you?”**

It will impact the way you choose to live every moment of every day.

So this morning...one little phrase:

“...slow to anger...”

And we really need to talk about this, because there is a lot of misunderstanding about God's anger or sometimes it's called the wrath of God. And it has done much harm to many people, even many Christians...in the way they think about God and how God looks at them and treats them.

There's a Farside comic that kind of depicts how many people view God...

PIC of Farside comic

God is sitting at his computer...and there's a guy kind of walking along the street, just minding his own business...but there's a piano hanging over his head and God has finger on the smite.

Is that what God does?

John Ortberg talks about this concept in relation to the insurance business. Did you ever notice this, something happens like a flood, earthquake, hurricane, sometimes worldwide pandemic...do you know what these are called in the insurance business? **“Acts of God”**. Somebody gets a big insurance pay out. That’s good fortune. But earthquake...Act of God. And it begs the question, is that what God is like?

It’s one of the reasons, many people have trouble seeing God as Moses did...speaking face to face as one speaks with a friend.

Today, we want to talk about God’s anger.

First,

I. The Hebrew

I said through this series we’re gonna become Hebrew scholars and try and understand the meaning of the original phraseology here in Exodus.

In this the case the Hebrew phrase **slow to anger = erek apayim**. Everybody say that with me.

Now everybody turn to someone in the room and just say to them “You are...erek apayim”. Want to know what you said, literally to that person, in Hebrew. **“You are long in the nostrils.”**

Isn’t that great? God said to Moses, *“I am Yahweh, Yahweh, the compassionate and gracious God...and long in the nostrils.”* So what’s the deal with long nostrils and what does it have to do with anger?

You can tell a lot about someone by their facial expression, can’t you? Think for a minute about what happens when you get angry **(PIC OF LITTLE KID ANGRY**

FACE). There are certain indicators in your face. Brows scrunch and move closer together. Purse your lips. Sometimes your chin goes up in the air. And often your nostrils begin to flare out.

In fact, I was reading a fascinating article about this, “the human facial expression of anger” is considered a phenomenon because it is a universal expression. It’s basically the same world-wide; which is not the case of other kinds of expressions.

In the US, thumbs up (**emoji**) is a symbol of “every thing’s good”. But in the Middle East, thumbs up means, “I’m not happy with you.” Or in the US, the OK sign (**Emoji**) is a symbol meaning, well, “everything’s ok.” In Brazil that same sign, means vehemently “everything is NOT ok.”

But no matter where you are in the world, the indicators of an angry face remain exactly the same across cultures! In fact, studies have been done on this, the expression of anger is made even by children who have been blind since birth and never saw an angry face.

It should not surprise then that even in the ancient Hebrew world, nostrils are indicators of anger.

Let me just give you a couple other of examples where this phrase is used in Scripture.

Proverbs 14 – Whoever is erek apayim has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.

The opposite of long in the nostrils is “quick tempered”...easily angered.

Proverbs 16 – Whoever is erek apayim is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

In this verse, the synonym for long in the nostrils (slow to anger) is “rules his spirit” or what we call “self-control.”

You get the idea here. It’s not that a person doesn’t get angry, it’s that you don’t lose your temper and explode or fly off the handle. You are in control, even in the midst of your feelings.

God is erek apayim...patient, self-controlled.

Now there are two emphasis to this phrase so let’s look at both. On the one hand,

A. God is SLOW to anger.

Emphasis on the word slow.

Unlike the other ancient god’s who get upset at a whim, Yahweh doesn’t. He isn’t edgy or fickle. He doesn’t slam doors or storm out of the house in a fit of rage. He doesn’t scream or hit walls.

There’s a fairly popular super hero who says, “**Don’t make me angry, you won’t like me angry!**” and when he get’s angry his demeanor and even his entire physical body transforms (**PIC OF Hulk**). This is kind of like an ancient view of the god’s, don’t make me angry, you won’t like me if I’m angry.

(Ortberg)

In fact, Comer points out something really neat about this phrase. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, the writers used the greek word meaning “patient” for this phrase or sometimes in English we’ll say “long-suffering.”

There's another translation of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic, which is most likely the language Jesus used. They translate this passage in Exodus 34 **"God is patient, the One who makes anger distant..."**

Isn't that great? Yahweh's anger is "far away."

And I think this is just really important. I think there are many people who believe God is almost eager to get angry.

1 John 4 says...**God is love.**

You never read in the Bible that God is wrath or anger. Anger is his response to evil or sin in the world, but it's not the way he feels about you.

In fact, this phrase, **"slow to anger..."** shows up 7 times in the Old Testament and every time it shows up it is paired with the very next phrase **"slow to anger and abounding in love."**

No one, in the ancient world thought of God this way before. Baal was not a loving God. Zeus was not a loving God. Molech was not a loving God. This whole idea that God is a God of love, slow to anger...came through the belief of this little Nation, Israel. (Ortberg)

Ok, but there's another side as well. God is SLOW to anger.

B. God is slow to ANGER.

God does get angry.

So let's just talk about this for a minute because the idea of God getting angry makes many people a little bit uncomfortable and the idea has often been abused and misunderstood.

There's a pretty well-known, outspoken atheist, named Richard Dawkins, who believes that religion and belief in God, is dangerous and he's written a book called *The God Delusion*. And one of the most famous quotes from that book goes like this... *"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."*

And it would take a whole sermon maybe a series to deal with some of where Dawkins ends up here.

I was gonna read more but he really get's nasty after that. (haha). Pretty scathing description of God. But it's not just atheists who wonder these things sometimes. Sometimes its seekers or even believers.

On **July 8th, 1741**...an evangelist preacher named Jonathan Edwards (**PIC OF EDWARDS**) preached a sermon that is widely regarded as, perhaps the most influential sermon in the history of North American Christianity. That sermon was called, **"Sinners in the hands of an Angry God."**

Let me just quote from one particular portion of this most-influential sermon:

"The God that holds you over the pit of Hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten

thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent in ours.” (Zahnd)

And see, if you believe that is truly God’s disposition towards you, it will certainly have an impact on the way you live your life.

So two things you should know about God’s anger.

1. Mostly, God gets angry about evil.

Psalm 5:4-6 - ⁴ For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. ⁵ The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong; ⁶you destroy those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, LORD, detest

The truth is anger is an appropriate response to some things that happen in this world...namely evil or sin.

What is the opposite of love?

The Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel said, **“The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.”** (ie. not caring about it.)

God is not indifferent to injustice, evil, sin. He cares. It makes him angry. Angry because he loves people, the world so much.

Every time you read about a child sold into prostitution by her family. Makes God angry.

Every time you hear about a husband who abused his wife. It makes God angry.

Every time you read about rape or murder or genocide. Makes God angry.

Every time a careless, greedy, wealthy nation, exploits and takes advantage of other underprivileged people and nations. Makes God angry.

Every time Christians post nasty, scathing remarks about other people, co-workers, neighbors, family members, politicians. Makes God angry.

Violence, greed, hatred, sickness, starvation, hypocrisy, arrogance, lust...you want me to keep going...what kind of God would God be, if he was just indifferent to those things. If he just ignored, overlooked those things.

These things were not intended to be part of God's good creation. When they happen they make God angry.

But second,

2. God's anger is proportional.

This is one of the major differences between God's anger and our anger.

We say we're after justice, but really what we want is revenge. A personal vendetta. Retaliation. We explode or blow a gasket in a fit of rage. Our anger is impatient. And it's usually not proportional.

When my younger brother, Nick and I were little. Every once in a while, we thought it would be cool to have boxing matches. But we didn't have gloves. So we would put a pair of socks over our fists, as if that tiny layer of padding would do anything. And it often started off pretty friendly. Soft little jabs. But it never failed eventually one of us would get in a good shot on the other one. And in a matter of seconds, the intensity could escalate so quickly. Look we never got into any serious fights. Nick was always and still is one my best friends.

But you get the idea right. This tendency in humans to get someone back to a greater degree than what happened to us.

Think about the kinds things people will do in their anger. Smash a tennis racquet. Punch a wall. As if it's the walls fault.

“He hit me, so I beat him to a pulp...”

God's anger is not like that. It's always appropriate and proportional.

Remember the story in Exodus 3. God asking Moses to go lead the people out of captivity. And Moses begins giving a list of excuses why he can't do this. “I'm not qualified. I don't speak well.” We're actually told in the story, **“So the Lord's anger burned against Moses...”** What did God do?

He didn't throw a tantrum or lose his temper. He gave Moses someone to go along with him, to speak for him.

If you want just a really helpful way to picture this, if you want to know what God anger looks like in action...look no further than the symbol of our faith...the cross of Jesus. This is where God's anger and love meet. God's anger toward sin, but his abounding love for sinners...and the result is forgiveness, grace, salvation for the human race.

God's anger is always appropriate and proportional.

Ok,

II. So What?

Let's just talk for a minute and think about a couple of really practical implications for how this impacts the way we live as followers of Jesus.

A. What do I get angry about?

There is a time to be angry...injustice, evil, sin.

The problem isn't that we get angry. The problem for us is usually the kinds of things we get angry about. Petty or selfish inconveniences.

I get angry because the official made a bad call against my team.

I get angry when my food order doesn't come out exactly as I ordered it.

I get angry because I had to stand in line longer than I wanted.

I get angry because I was put on hold.

When my schedule gets interrupted.

I get angry someone else took the last roll of toilet paper.

There are things worth being angry about...these aren't!

Second, let's just take this one step further and make this a little more personal. It's appropriate to get angry about sin, but it's...

B. Best if we start with our own.

Many of us are quick to get angry about the sin we see in others. We're quick to point it out, call it out...yet we so easily overlook, ignore...our own.

Jesus actually talks about our tendency to do this in his sermon on the mount.

Why do you look at the speck of saw dust in your brothers eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye. How can you say to your brother, let

me take the speck out of your eye when all the time, there is a plank in your own eye. You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye...then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brothers eye.

Have you become indifferent about the sin in your own life? Do you ignore it? Are you starting to become comfortable with it?

Because you see that greed (however small you think it is)...its wrong.

The lust in your heart (however small you think it is)...it's wrong.

Racism.

Dishonesty.

Gluttony.

Grumbling.

Contentious spirit.

Sin is worth being angry about. Best to start with your own.

Third and finally, when it comes to our anger...

C. Emphasis on the word SLOW.

We need to be long in the nostrils.

James wrote this really powerful verse... **“everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry”**. (James 1:18) You just take this one verse and begin putting it into practice this week and it will rock your world.

Like when your kids are having an off day and you find yourself constantly saying, “Stop fighting, please just listen.” Slow to anger.

When your co-worker doesn't follow through. Slow to anger.

Anger is often an emotional response. You feel your heart beating faster, we talked about facial expressions and much of it is related to oxygen to the brain. Did you know that? One of the first things we stop doing in our anger is we stop breathing properly. And so one of the best, most practical things you can do, when you begin to feel that anger coming on, that emotional response. One of the best things you can do is to start taking **SLOW, DEEP breathes**. That will help you to have long nostrils.

The other great thing is to purposefully lower your tone of voice, speak quieter, when you feel yourself getting angry.

In addition, there's seems to be some kind of connection between anger and our mouths. "slow to speak and slow to become angry."

Are you familiar with the phrase...**"getting the last word"**? You know what I mean, when I say "the last word?" Getting the last word has become an addiction in our culture. We are always trying to justify or clarify or set others straight, and our desire to have the last word, continues to cause, fighting, screaming, posting...lost tempers, inappropriate anger.

I heard this fascinating story a couple months ago. Some of you know I admire a theologian named Dallas Willard. Author of many books that I read.

One pastor recounts a story about Dallas. He was lecturing in large room, at a prestigious academic university on a given topic. One of the students took issue with his lecture, right towards the end of the lecture and called him out, publicly and disrespectfully.

The pastor watched, anticipating how Dallas was going to roast this young college student and put him in his place...you know get the "last word". Dallas, quietly responded, "Thank you for sharing." And said nothing more.

After the lecture, the Pastor confronted Willard. *“Dallas, why didn’t you respond? The young man’s argument was flawed and you know it, you could have set him straight right there, in front of everyone.”*

Dallas smiled and said, *“God is trying to teach me the discipline of not always needing to have the last word. It’s something I really need to learn.”*

When I heard this story the first time, I was shaken to the core and it has stuck with me ever since. Because I have this problem.

It did not take long to look closely into my own life and the conversations I have and realize that I am often so concerned about setting people straight and making sure I get the last word and wanting to make people think like me.

Perhaps you’re like me and you’re even arrogant enough to think that you have the most clever argument that the other person didn’t hear yet, and if you just give them your argument, then they’ll come over to your side.

How often has that happened, your clever arguments won the day?

Desire for the last word, leading to anger and turmoil...destroying our nation right now. So many people clamoring for the last word.

This week, Five Forks, lets practice the discipline of not needing to have the last word. Why would we do that...because we follow the God who is...

Slow to anger.

That’s who God is. That’s who he wants us to be.

