

GOOD MORNING/INVOCATION – BS/HS

BS: This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

HS: Good morning. We are so honored to have you here with us today, or tuned in with us today. Today may your hearts and your souls be refreshed. Would you turn around and shake the hand of the person next to you and say God loves you and so do I.

BS: Let's begin with a prayer: So Father, we come to you in Jesus' name and we thank you that there is no name that is more powerful than his name. And we pray that you would help us, Lord, in our time of trial and difficulty. Lord, many people come with financial burdens. Many people come with addictions. Lord, others are coming with relational issues. All of us come with our sins saying Lord, help us. Renew us, forgive us, we want to draw closer to you and to each other. Lord, we thank you. Help us to be more like Jesus and it's in his name we pray, amen.

SCRIPTURE – Genesis 4:1-9 - HS

In preparation for Bobby's message, the words of our Lord found in Genesis: Now Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering; fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering, he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you but you must rule over it. May we as God's beloved children move from bitterness and blaming others to wholeheartedly blessing others.

INTERVIEW – DR. SARAH SUMNER

BS: My guest today is Dr. Sarah Sumner, the founder of Right on Mission. She tailor makes mission statements for individuals, couples, families and organizations. Her mission is to build integrity in the church. She's a speaker and the author of four books and her newest book is called *Angry Like Jesus: Using his example to spark your moral courage*. Please welcome with me Dr. Sarah Sumner. Dr. Sumner, thank you. So nice to meet you. Now that's an interesting title for a book, *Angry Like Jesus*. That actually can probably cause a lot of people to react emotionally. What do you mean by that when you say angry like Jesus?

SS: Well Jesus anger is a different kind of anger. It's a different kind of anger than sinful anger. It's not like our anger most of the time. And so Jesus anger is an anger that hates the sin that's happened against you. So many people have been through things that just shouldn't have happened to you. And sometimes we forget that we have a God who is so sorry and does not want that to have happened to you. It was not his will for you to be mistreated. Jesus anger is against that sin. And Jesus anger is there to tell us 'how dare you not believe in the God who loves you.' And God is faithful. And that's really the theme of his anger.

BS: There is sometimes this idea in the church that being or feeling angry is a sin, or its bad, or you're not supposed to do it. What do you say, I mean like feeling angry, I mean that's a normal human thing, right?

SS: Right.

BS: And what you're saying is what?

SS: Well you know there's a commandment that says abhor what is evil. And it's a sin not to abhor what is evil. So if we're like in the book of 1st Samuel where Eli has two sons who are in the temple and they're profaning the temple, and Eli was not angry, and this is Eli's sin to not be angry.

God doesn't like religious corruption. As a matter of fact, I don't know anybody who likes religious corruption. And this is so much what we see Jesus anger against is our own lack of integrity.

BS: So anger, you would say, in some ways, Jesus type of anger can actually be healing to us, it can help us with addictions, it can even help us with things like bitterness. Is that true?

SS: Here's the thing – godly anger battles against sinful anger. Godly anger goes against whatever your secret sin is. I had a secret sin. When I was about 22 years old, my parents got a divorce and I always grew up as being kind of like sweet Sarah. I've loved the Lord since I was three years old that I can remember, but when my parents got a divorce, I was so disturbed inside and I didn't even know I was angry. And I just kept getting skinnier and skinner, and I didn't even know what an eating disorder was, but I had one. And Jesus anger against the sin of the lies in my head. I had a lot of negative thoughts and I just thought that they were true. And so I really was deceived. But his anger against my pride, because I didn't want to be from a family that was broken, his anger against the lies in my head where I thought I was ugly. I thought I was defective, just kind of overall something was wrong with me. And when I learned about his anger, I learned that he validated my pain and that he didn't want my parents to get a divorce, either. And it made me love him that everything I was sad about and all the hurt things in my life, he hated it, too, and he was inviting me to hate it too, but I had to do my own repenting. And you know I could have got well by being gentle with myself and having Jesus anger. It's sort of a funny combination like going you know what these are good arms, and I would pat my legs and go God gave you these legs. This is good. You know I talked about this; it's part of my early testimony.

BS: So give me an example of what it means to actually be angry like Jesus in a way that's helpful and healing.

SS: Well you know what, can I go back to that passage because..

BS: Absolutely.

SS: ..you just read that about Cain. You know here's Cain. Cain's face falls because Abel's sacrifice is good, and Cain's isn't, and now Cain is angry. And he has sinful anger. He has the wrong kind of anger because he's not trusting God. And that's exactly why God approved of Abel's sacrifice and disapproved of Cain's.

Okay now watch this. In the Hebrew, in the original, in the scriptures, it says that Cain's face fell. It's like his countenance fell. And that's what happened to me. When my parents got a divorce, my face fell. My face fell into a toilet. And now here's God who lifts up my face and he's shining on me and telling me Sarah, I love you. And I'm confused even though I know him. So some of us have known him and you know him and you still have things to learn.

And so his anger is against going get those lies out of your head. And stop killing yourself. Live! I want you to live! Come with me and I'm going to show you how to live, and I'm going to show you how to live, and I'm going to show you to live in humility that even though your parents are divorced, and even though your family kind of blew up, and even though, even though, and all the different things in my story or your story, I'm a good God and God is greater. And he's greater than what condemns my heart, and he's greater than the lies in my head. And I got well, and those 15 stories, you'll find out other people who got well, too.

BS: And so that's really the thing, is it. I mean by being honest about what we feel angry about, receiving empathy for our wounds and our hurts, we feel anger whether or not we admit it's there, and very often Christians just kind of shove it down and pretend like it's not there. In the end, that makes us embittered. That can actually make us feel more angry. And so what I hear you saying is be honest about the fact that you feel angry when boundaries are crossed, when you're violated or wounded or hurt by life, and in a way, being honest about your anger frees you up to let go, in many ways, of your bitterness and it actually frees you from addiction, it frees you to be loving even towards your enemies, even if you feel anger at some of the things that people do.

SS: Yes, that's right. Jesus says you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. We can truth our way out of any addiction. You can truth your way out of any secret sin. Or some of you go well you know what, I don't really have that, but everybody I know is stuck at least in one way. And that truth will set you free if you get truth right there in your stuckness.

BS: That's great. Well Sarah, thank you so much. The book is called *Angry Like Jesus: Using his example to spark your moral courage*. Dr. Sumner, thank you so much for being here today. God bless you and thanks for your encouragement. We appreciate you.

THANK YOU/DECLARATION – BS

BS: Whoever you are, we want you to be encouraged. I need you to feel and know that God loves you, he hasn't given up on you, and that your brightest days are ahead. It doesn't matter

how old you are, how sick you are, how much you've lost – God makes all things new. And the name of Jesus can break any chain. We want you to know God loves you. I love you. And this church loves you. If you're ever in Orange County, come down and visit us so you can feel the love, right church? We want you to come.

And I also want to say a special thank you, especially now in November to many of you; a special thank you for everyone who continues to support this ministry. I know we ask for money a lot, and I sometimes feel badly about that, but you know I'm passionate about this. We worked out the math, everyone, that for every eight cents we get, we reach another person, so when I think about that in terms of donations, I think man, every time a buck comes in ten more people get reached.

And so for me, I'm passionate about what we're doing. I see that every month we're reaching more and more people. I drive a Camry, I live in an 1800 square foot house in Costa Mesa, okay? This money is not for me. It is for this mission. And so I want to say thank you to all of you who continue to support us. We're so grateful for you. Thank you for trusting us. We love you.

All right, church, would you stand with me and we're going to say this confession together. Hold your hands out like as a sign of receiving. I'm not what I do. I'm not what I have. I'm not what people say about me. I am the beloved of God. It's who I am. No one can take it from me. I don't need to worry, I don't have to hurry, I can trust my friend Jesus and share his love with the world.

Amen, that's the gospel of something worth rejoicing about. We are all imperfect people.

MESSAGE/PRAYER – BOBBY SCHULLER "From Bitterness to Blessing"

Well today we are in this season for fall. We're in the season of talking about putting on the mind of Christ. What it means to think the way Jesus thinks, and to think the way Jesus thought.

One of the most profound teachings Jesus ever had was that he actually sort of changed the passage in Deuteronomy that every Jew had memorized. In this passage, it said "behold Israel the Lord your God. The Lord is one." Every Jew had that memorized. And then the line after that was "therefore, love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength." And Jesus, several times, but namely when he's in the temple, rephrases that. In Matthew 22 they say 'what's the greatest commandment?' And he says "love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Why does he do that? Well this was a way that Jewish rabbis would teach. It was his way of interpreting what strength means. In Jesus' view, to be strong means to be strong here. That the strength of the individual is an intellectual strength. It is a strength, not to be smart, necessarily, but a strength to think about what you think about.

And so we are beginning this fall season, or we're carrying on this fall season thinking about what we think about. Paying attention to what we pay attention to. Realizing that our thoughts become our actions. That we actually have a lot of control and a lot more power over our thoughts than we thought we did. And so we want to spend time thinking about what we think about so that we can be strong like Jesus was strong. To put on the mind of Christ. To think and to see the way he thinks and sees.

So today we're going to talk about really part of your thought life that's most related to your relationships and that is the bitterness and blame that very often pervades our hearts. All of us, if we're in community, whether it be a marriage, community of church, community of friendships, where we work, all of us easily are ensnared by blame. Blaming those we live with, blaming those we work with, and too often that blame can become toxic bitterness in our hearts that begins to erode trust and love and intimacy in our relationships, including our relationships with God.

So today I want to talk about what it means to have control over your thoughts of blame and bitterness, and to not allow too long of your blame and bitterness to take hold in your heart. We got to think about how we think about people, including our enemies. We need to think about how we think about our colleagues, our co workers, our spouses. Many of us feel bitter and we haven't even realized it. We have emotions of bitterness in our heart towards our spouses. We have emotions of bitterness towards our parents, towards our children, towards our colleagues, towards our enemies. And that bitterness, when anger gets a foothold and it moves from being righteous anger to sinful anger as Dr. Sumner talked about, or it really becomes a lens through which you see the world and all of a sudden all of the healthy relationships that you have in your life begin to erode.

If you're married, if you have a serious relationship, one of the biggest temptations that you're going to have is the two relational sins. You know what they are, from Dallas Willard? The two great relational sins are attack and withdraw. This is what happens when our hearts get embittered towards the people that we live with. Attack and withdraw. John Ortberg and Miroslav

Volf wrote on this the idea that these are the two great relational sins that they use the example of the Middle East. In the Middle East today, this is happening. Jihad. The Arabic word Jihad means literally attack – to attack. And in the Middle East, the Muslims who live in parts of Palestine and other parts of the Middle East, they proclaim this word Jihad – attack, vengeance, revenge.

And the Jews have a word in Hebrew, the word is *hafrada*, and *hafrada* means withdraw. *Hafrada* is what they did when they built the walls. And so as Jihad came upon the Jewish people, *hafrada* was the response. So in other words, literally attacking and stonewalling. That the more Muslims in the Middle East attacked Israel, the more Israel withdraw and put up walls. And now a society continues to break and be fragmented based on these two relational sins – attack and withdraw. And so the more the attacks, the higher the walls go up.

And many of you, this is your relationships, your friendships, your marriages, when you're dating, your colleagues. There is usually one person that attacks and one person that stonewalls and both people feel hurt. This is not what God has called us to do. He has not called us to Jihad and he has not called us to *hafrada*, and this is not a political commentary, by the way. This is a social commentary. This is about your heart.

What happens when you feel wounded? Do you attack and do you withdraw? Do you engage in these two relational sins? Well if you're doing that, it's very likely because you have bitterness and blame in your heart. Do you feel bitter? Who do you feel embittered towards? Do you feel embittered towards people that love you? And what we want to talk about today is moving away from our bitter thoughts. From putting those to death and really becoming the kinds of people that can embrace gentleness and embrace a blessing. Where we become the kind of people that can bless those in our lives even when they hurt us. And that is something that is possible for believers. It's something that's a promise of Jesus and that's exactly what Jesus did for us.

In Genesis chapter 4, which Hannah read this morning, there is this famous story, the prototype story of blame and envy, the story of Cain and Abel. Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve. And in this story, these two brothers had essentially two vocations. Cain's job was to work the soil. We assume he's a farmer. And Abel's job was to care for the flocks, maybe sheep or cattle. And they both go to make an offering before the Lord. Abel's offering, it says it's the choice of something like this, fatted animals. It was something that was really good. You know, it was something that was like expensive; nice. It was one of the best parts of whatever his flock or his pasture was. And it just says Abel "brought something before God."

And God's response, we don't really know why, but God looks on favor on Abel's offering but does not look with favor on Cain's offering. And this causes Cain to feel downcast so that his face looks down. This is like a symbol of shame and sadness. But it's also says that he feels very angry, he feels embittered towards his brother.

Now God's response is this. He says to Cain, "why are you angry and why is your face downcast? If you just do what is right, will your offering not be accepted?" See here's one of the most important things you have to know about this story. We don't really know what it was, but Cain did something wrong and he knew it was wrong. It was probably that he gave God his leftovers. He gave him probably the vegetables he couldn't eat, or the vegetables that he didn't want, or he gave out of the stuff that was just a little extra instead of giving his first fruits. That's what most people think.

But for whatever reason, he did what was wrong in the eyes of God and Cain knew it and God knew it, but instead of taking responsibility, Cain gets embittered towards his brother. Why? I think he's blaming his brother. Now this is my commentary. But when I read this story, knowing how human beings are, very often when we make a mistake, when we mess up, we do our best to see if there is someone else we can blame, someone else who can be the scapegoat, someone else who you can say well it's a little bit my fault but really if they didn't do this, I wouldn't have done that. Really it's their fault if you just think about it. We employ the inner attorney to go to work for us, to cause us to think why it's not my fault and why it's their fault, and then that allows us to feel angry and embittered.

God just says to him, if you just do what is right, you'll be accepted. Just do what's right. But instead of taking responsibility and saying I did what was wrong, I messed up, next time I'm going to do what's right, he starts to foster blame, which becomes bitterness and that bitterness becomes blood.

When we do what is wrong, the natural tendency is to find a way to not take responsibility and to blame someone else. And the reason this is dangerous is not only that we don't get better, but that we actually harm innocent people. We become evil in doing things like that, and we destroy our relationships.

And God's response to Cain is this: "Sin is crouching at the door. It desires to have you but you must rule over it." What's he talking about? He's talking about his thoughts. You can almost see it in the story. Cain pacing back and forth, mustering up blame and bitterness in his heart. Oh, Abel thinks he's so holy. Oh, Abel thinks he's so great. What about all the other times when Abel did this? And what about when Abel did that? And when Abel did this to me, did God see that? You can almost see in the story Cain going back and forth harboring and growing and nurturing sinful bitter thoughts towards his brother, till he gets to the point where murdering his brother is what he wants. He just wants him dead. It's here, guys. It's here.

Many of us are losing in our friendships, our marriages, in our parenting, in our work because we're not controlling the bitter thoughts in here. We're not paying attention to our inner attorney that's going to work for us so that we don't have to take responsibility for our mistakes and so that we can blame others. We're not controlling our thoughts. This is a way that Cain rejects fault, which is so obviously his.

I am concerned about our society because the wealthier our society becomes, for whatever reason, the less responsible people have become. There seems to be something that happens in history. I forget which philosopher it was but he says "history is society's walking up the stairs in wooden shoes and walking down the stairs in silken slippers." That there's something about, I don't know if its wealth or the success of a nation. It doesn't have to be that way, but I see in our society a move away from taking responsibility to taking blame and entitlement. This is becoming the norm in our society. Blame someone else, if you can. Blame someone else, if you can! So that if I mess up at work, and I get confronted by my boss, my first thought is to think about who can I blame for this? Right? When I get in an argument with my husband or wife, or an argument with a family member or a friend, I am not thinking about myself, I'm thinking about how can I blame this other person.

You see the problem is in most cases when two people messed up, its 50/50, one person sees it as like 90% the other person's fault and maybe 10% my fault, but only because of their 90%. And many of us approach our relationships in this way where it's completely someone else's fault and not mine.

I know very often John Ortberg was saying something like he had an argument with his wife that sounded something like this: 'My life is harder than your life, therefore, you should serve me more.' That was the undergirding. He didn't say it that way, but that was the undergirding message. And many of us, we approach each other, and not paying attention, yet we're finding ways to blame others and it's destroying our relationships. It's causing us to attack and withdraw. Attack and withdraw. To put up walls. To lash out.

And I want to challenge you. I think the Christian way to think is not to say how can I blame someone else, but how can I take responsibility? Yes! If you think that, congratulations. And if you get into a tiff, if you mess up at work, if you make a moral failure, if you're in your relationships you ask how can I take responsibility for this, I want to say yes, you're my hero. Congratulations, especially if you're young. You see this is the way that the human beings work. We think well if I blame them, they're going to hear me out and they're going to change their ways. I don't know why we think that because it's never worked.

But in truth, what usually happens with the people we love, is when you say you know what? I'm taking responsibility. Then the other person says, what do they do? Well, you know I'm not perfect either. And there is something about, not always, but something about offering the olive branch that actually begins a mending, especially when people love each other.

When you take responsibility for your mistakes, whether it be in your relationships or your job or in your spiritual life, you first of all become a happier person because you don't allow bitterness and entitlement in your heart. And I think you become a happier person because you realize that when you blame someone else, what you're essentially saying is I have no power over this. But when you take responsibility, you're saying I messed up, but I have some power in this. I can do something to make a difference. That keeps you from feeling despair and powerlessness in your relationships, in your work and in your spiritual life. So when you take responsibility, you're also taking a degree of power in a good way. You're saying I have power to make this better than it is. And most importantly, and this is especially for leaders if you're a manager, when you take responsibility, you build trust.

Too many leaders blame those under them instead of taking responsibility. The more responsibility you can take, the happier you'll be, the more power you'll feel, and the more you'll build trust with people who follow you.

In the end, Christians have to be like Jesus. We have to change the blame and bitterness cycle. The more I blame you, the more you'll blame me. There is no one on earth that when they are blamed, almost nobody on earth that when they are blamed, they go you know, you're right. And very often the people that say you know you're right, are people that are still not taking responsibility, they are actually sometimes making it worse. Anyway it's a long story, but in the end, we need to change the cycle, change the way we think about rude, unkind and unfair people.

There's this axiom, I'm sure all of us have heard it, that hurt people hurt people. When you feel wounded by someone else, you're likely to go and wound someone that you love, and that's an unfortunate part about being human. The soul is very, very fragile and it's easily wounded. And too often, we think well someone's tough. Their soul isn't fragile. Trust me, everyone's soul is fragile. Doesn't matter how tough, how hard you think someone is, painful words, painful actions, blame and bitterness what hurts. So the point is this that when you feel hurt by someone, most of the time it's not about you. I guess that's what I'm saying. They're not criticizing you, even though they think they are, they're operating out of pain and woundedness.

And so there is a way to win arguments in Jesus' way, and this is the way. To win like Jesus is this: Dallas called it the allure of gentleness. The allure of gentleness. Did you know gentleness is a scriptural mandate that we are called to be gentle in our relationships, that even when we want to lash out and we want to stonewall or we want to attack, that we're actually called to be gentle? We should speak the truth in love, we should maintain boundaries, but there's something about being gentle in our approach that draws people into repentance and to healing.

So I want to encourage you to do this. See the best in people. When you see the best in people, you bring the best out of them, and when you see the worst in people, you bring the worst out of them. I think this is basically relational faith or fear that when we have faith relationally, we see the best in people. When we have fear, we relational see the worst. And so the kinds of people that always see the worst in others, think that they're safe but they're not. They're actually causing people to be further from them, but people who have faith and say I know this is not you. I know this is not the person I married. I know this is not the person I became friends with. I know that's not the person I hired or the person I came to work for. That when you see the best in others and you say it to them, that can change. That can change people.

I just want to finish with this last thought. So you might find that in your life you're looking for breakthrough, that there are things in your life or your relationships or your business or your job, and you think man I'm doing everything right. Why can't I just get a breakthrough? Are you the kind of person who's blessing others or cursing others? If you need a breakthrough, it's time that you start paying attention to the way in which your behavior is either blessing or cursing those around you.

Pay attention to your thoughts. Let go of bitterness. Put an end to Jihad and I forget the other one. Put an end to attack and withdraw, all right? Put an end to that. Don't stonewall, don't attack, talk with gentleness. Talk with the people that you love with gentleness. You can speak the truth, maintain boundaries, but do it with love. Amen?

Father in the name of Jesus, we thank you for all that you've given us. And we pray that you'd help us to pay attention to what we think about. Lord, help us to not give harbor to thoughts of vengeance and violence and blame. Lord, we pray that we would never become embittered, that you'd help us to be people who take responsibility. Lord, thank you that you love us, thank you that you've seen the evil that's done against us, thank you that you can be angry and that you can help us, Father, find relief from our bitterness. Lord, we love you and we pray in Jesus' name, and all God's people said, amen.

BENEDICTION - BS

BS: Thank you, friends for being here today. And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you his peace in your coming in and in your going out, in your lying down and in your rising up, in your labor and in your leisure, in your laughter and in your tears until you come to stand before Jesus on that day in which there is no sunset and no dawning, amen.