

Do you do well to be angry?

Jonah 4:1-4

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¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? 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. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴ And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be angry?”.

Our temperaments, moods, attitudes and words can be such a stimulating force and influence others to inspire, encourage to something beautiful and noble. Or they can have quite the opposite effect. Anger in particular can have such a chilling or paralyzing effect on others that it prevents any reasonable discourse, peace and harmony.

Paul writes in the book of Galatians that anger is a product of the sinful flesh.

Jesus raised the standard for his disciples so much that he equated anger to murder.

Are you a Christian given to anger?

The antidote to anger is crucifying our flesh constantly, consistently and dramatically and pursuing the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience”.

Here we see Jonah, the prophet of God, was given to anger. Not just some anger but burning anger. He was fuming. And he feels justified in his anger so much that he rather die.

But God is so kind with Jonah. His question to Jonah is this, “Do you do well to be angry?” “Is it alright for you to be angry?”.

God knows Jonah is behaving rather foolishly. There is a lot commanded in the Bible to not be given to anger.

Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools. Ecclesiastes 7:9

A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated. Proverbs 14:17

In the past few weeks, we have been looking in the book of Jonah. And we have been considering the character of God. God is a God of righteous anger. However, his anger is not like the anger of man. God's anger is holy anger. God's anger is never impulsive and his anger is never directed at the helpless or the needy. God's anger is directed against evil and unrighteous people who harden their consciences and do wicked deeds. God is perfect in justice. When you hear some of the atrocities some people have done and continue to do, God has marked them for a day of righteous judgment. Unless, they repent they are doomed for disaster.

"The Lord lifts up the afflicted; he casts the wicked to the ground" Psalm 147:6

And yet, God is slow to anger. God is perfect in patience. Compared to God's compassion, his anger lasts for a moment. And Jonah knows this.

God sent Jonah on a mission to Nineveh. He did not obey the first time. And after all that drama, he repents and obeys the second time. He went to Nineveh and completed God's mission. And now, we see another drama unfold in the eyes of God. The drama of Jonah's anger.

What prompted Jonah's anger?

Look at verse *ten* from chapter three and verse *one* from chapter four.

¹⁰ *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*

¹ *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.*

Jonah was appointed as God's messenger. That is a such a huge privilege in itself. Jonah's ministry is because of God and by the mercy of God (2 Corinthians 4:1). And when people repent after receiving God's message, it is wonderful and glorious. Its calls for a celebration. There is rejoicing in heaven when *one* sinner repents. And here we see the whole city repents – from the least to the greatest. However, Jonah is so ticked off by the outcome. This is a very strange response. He has great anger. He went to Nineveh and said that in forty days the city would be destroyed. God told him to give that message. And he probably waited one day, two days, three days, four days.... forty days. And nothing happened. And Jonah is probably thinking, "Where is the fire, where is the smoke?". Jonah perhaps thought Nineveh would be like Sodom. Why is this city not burned down? Why has God not destroyed this city? God said he would bring disaster on Nineveh and now he has relented. And that makes Jonah

mad. Not just a little mad he is fuming. You see, what Jonah does not realize yet is that God's grace can outlast God's righteous anger in response to repentance. God will defer his own judgment and wrath when humanity turns from their sin. God relents his anger when he sees a contrite and broken heart. That is the Gospel! *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*¹⁸ *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.* John 3:17-18

The world is already judged and condemned by sin. The good news is that there is grace for those who believe, confess and hope in God. The people of Nineveh believed God that they would die in their sin. The king himself confessed to evil and violence. And they called out to God to spare them. And hoped in God. They believed, confessed and hoped in God. And God saw their *repentant* hearts, and he *relented*. This is so great!

But look at Jonah's reaction? Sullenness, anger, tantrums.

Jonah does not like the fact that the people of Nineveh survived.

He is angry with God. *And what does Jonah do in his anger?*

Let's look at verses *two* and *three*.

² *And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? 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."* ³ *Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."*

Notice Jonah prays to God in his anger. That is positive. He complains to God. It doesn't make Jonah right in his anger. But complaining to God is better than taking out your anger on other people. There is a distinction between faithless disobedient grumbling and an honest pouring out of your heart to God. Jonah has been obedient the second time. Jonah has been obedient and yet angry.

The prophet Jeremiah had a similar complaint *"Righteous are you, O Lord, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?"* Jeremiah 12:1

Aren't you glad God is a God who hears your complaints?

When you feel anxious or fearful or angry, who do you go to?

“Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice” Psalm 55:17

“I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him” Psalm 142:2

It is ok to pour out your complaints to God. Cast all your anxieties on Jesus, because God cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7).

So, Jonah prays to God in his anger. And here is his reason we have been waiting for. He explains why he did not go to Nineveh the first time. This is why Jonah ran away from God. Because I *“knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster”*. Jonah knew all along about God’s character. Notice also Jonah says “you are” not “you were”. Does Jonah wish that God was sometimes slow to anger? He’s wrong if that is what he expects to be. God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and full of faithful love. Gracious – he gives what we don’t deserve. Just like the Ninevites, we deserved his righteous anger. But we received grace, mercy, love and compassion.

For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Psalm 30:5

The people of Israel were not faithful to God so many times and yet God was compassionate.

Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not faithful to his covenant. ³⁸ Yet he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath. Psalm 78: 37-38

We can spend days talking about the God’s faithfulness and his compassion. Surely, God did not need Jonah to remind who he is. And yet we see him struggling with God’s grace. Jonah is unwilling to make room in his heart for God’s grace. But he himself was a recipient of God’s grace. God had been sustaining his life so far.

And what else do we see in his prayer? Verse three.

Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

Jonah is just vexed with the whole thing. He is a prophet of God. When his prediction did not come true, he condemns himself. Maybe it was credibility issue for him as well. What will others think about me now? I feel so small. Do you feel that way?

Yes, we are all small before God. But doesn’t Jonah have God on his side? What more could he ask for.

God only has one question for Jonah in verse four. Jonah, “Do you have a good reason to be angry?”. Lord willing, we’ll pick up next week to see Jonah’s reply and God’s answer to him. But do you know that his Word reminds that you can trust God with all that happens in your life? God is the most trustworthy Being in the universe. Even when we don’t understand everything and why they happen, God’s ways are inscrutable.

“we know that for those who love God all things work together for good” Romans 8:28

As we close here are a few instructions from Scripture about anger and why it is such a detriment to your soul.

- a. *Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.* Psalm 37:5
- b. *A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.* Psalm 29:2
- c. *A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.* Psalm 15:18
- d. *Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, ²⁵ lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.* Psalm 22:24-25
- e. *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.* James 1:19-20

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Do you do well to be angry?** Jonah 4:1-4

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why did Jonah get very angry when he saw that God relented of the disaster prophesied on Nineveh? Go around and share.

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. When things don't work out as expected, would you have any reason to be angry with God? Why or why not? Ezra 8:22, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 1:9
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: What can we learn about anger from the Bible? Galatians 6:19-20, Psalm 16:32, 19:11, 37:8, Colossians 3:8, Ephesians 4:29-32