

“IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU TO BE ANGRY?”

Jonah 4

I think all of us have had friends or acquaintances that we wish we had never become involved with. They took some things we shared with them and twisted them into something altogether different than what we meant. Or we tried to help them and they ended up being angry at us and thinking that we were trying to do them harm. Or they were so conflicted that they began on one side of a controversy and end up on the other side. Their enemies one day are their friends the next and we get caught in the middle. That was the kind of acquaintance Jonah was to God. After being rescued by God from drowning in the sea and being empowered by God to lead Nineveh in a mighty revival, Jonah comes back around to the same mind-set that he had when he first set off for Tarsus. He was repenting of his repentance! He made God the cause for him running away to Tarsus. It was God's fault.

About the only good things that I can say about Jonah at this point is that he is brutally honest about himself in reporting his sinful attitudes, actions, and his anger. Also that he told God how he felt. There are too many people who say one thing to God in prayer when they know that that is not how they really feel. They know that they have no intention of doing what they promise God they will do.

1.) Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. (Jonah 3:10 NKJV) But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" (Jonah 3:10;4:1-4 NKJV)

Jonah was angry because God had said He was going to overthrow Nineveh, and had sent Jonah to announce the doom pending for that city. Then God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them. Was Jonah angry because Nineveh was an imminent threat to his own country and he had been looking forward to that threat being removed? Or was he angry because for forty days he had announced the approaching devastation of God's wrath and now he looked like a fool who had given a false alarm. Whichever was the case or both, Jonah was angry; and that put him in some bad company.

Cain was angry and murdered his brother Abel. The sons of Jacob were angry over the rape of Dinah. Instead of only taking vengeance on the one who had disgraced their sister, they slaughtered the whole town of Shechem and took its possessions and animals for themselves. Saul became angry at David out of jealousy. Eventually his anger cost him his kingdom. King Herod became angry because the Wise men did not report back to him about the baby Jesus. He slaughtered all the babies two years old or less in the vicinity of Bethlehem.

God asked Jonah the same question that He had asked Cain – "Is it right for you to be angry?"

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20 NKJV)

2.) So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:5-8 NKJV)

What is Jonah thinking? Is he hoping that God will change His mind again? God gives Jonah a demonstration of what his wishes would mean. God prepared a plant and made it grow over Jonah's little shelter so that it might be a shade for his head. When I was a boy and we were living in Baltimore, the temperatures in the summer were high. There was no air conditioning, no grove of trees. My father built a lattice on the south side of the house. When summer began he planted castor beans. They grew very quickly, they had big leaves and thick foliage. All summer we had shade; the house was cool.

Jonah was delivered from his misery, and languished in the shade of that plant for one day. Just as God had prepared a great fish to save him from drowning, He had now prepared a plant to comfort him. But Jonah would have God go back on the comfort the Ninevites had enjoyed for that one day – that God had relented from the destruction He had pronounced on Nineveh because of its wickedness. They had repented and turned from their wicked ways. Now they were enjoying the joy of their salvation. Jonah would have them lose that comfort so God saw to it that Jonah lost his comfort. A worm destroyed the plant. God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint.

God was chastising Jonah. He wanted Jonah to see that he was wrong wishing misery for hundreds of thousands of people in that city. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

That is what anger means. It is wishing death on the persons you are angry with. It is a sin that is included in the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." Jonah's anger at the Ninevites and at God now turned back upon him so that he wished for himself that he might die.

3.) Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. "And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left-and much livestock?" (Jonah 4:9-11 NKJV)

I don't know what is harder to believe – that Jonah would answer God so arrogantly or that he would tell the world about it later. It would seem that no matter how sinful a person might be, that if they were called to stand before Almighty God and He said, "Is it right for you...?" they would have the humility or at least the common sense to admit they were wrong. But here we have Jonah standing up to God. What a ridiculous sight – a mere man, not a pimple on the face of the earth telling God that he is right; he'd rather die than say he's wrong.

God explains to Jonah that just as he had pity on a single plant, a plant that he had not even planted or cultivated, that He the Creator God had pity on a city of so many people that just the babies and toddlers alone number 120,000.

Did Jonah repent of his arrogant defiance of God? The book of Jonah ends with God's explanation of why He responded to Nineveh's repentance with mercy. What was Jonah's response to God? I believe the book of Jonah was Jonah's act of contrition. In it he glorifies God.

"I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind, and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter...."

That is the first stanza of a poem by Francis Thompson, *The Hound of Heaven*. Francis Thompson was a Christian who like Jonah fled from the presence of God and found that God in His mercy pursued him.

