

Pre-Story:

Nineveh heard and responded with humble repentance; God saw and responded with mercy and compassion; Jonah saw and responded with indignant anger at God

One of the greatest joys of the preacher's heart is when people turn from their self-trust and humbly receive God's mercy toward them in Christ with great hope. In fact, when one thinks of that which would bring a prophet the greatest joy, is it not that he was heard and heeded and that his ministry brought about the salvation of people? Not so with Jonah. In fact, Jonah is a strange and ironic cacophony of emotions in this little narrative. From silent stubborn defiance to grateful praise to stoic proclamation and here to an outburst of rage towards God. What is it that causes Jonah to become not only angry, but so angry that he wants to die? And what can we learn from this? Let us visit this small hill to the east of Nineveh and listen in to God's counseling session with His wayward self-righteous prophet.

1. Anger at God Reveals a Self-Righteous Heart

- a. Why did Jonah get angry?
 - i. God was merciful to those whom he did not believe deserved mercy
 1. "great displeasure" can read: "it was exceedingly evil to Jonah" (the same word for "wicked" in 1:2)
 2. Jonah thought that what God did was wrong, not merely uncomfortable to him
 3. This anger is a thinly veiled accusation that God's mercy was inappropriate
 - ii. What was it that caused Jonah to believe that they didn't deserve God's mercy?
 1. Exceedingly wicked?
 2. Violent oppressors of Israel?
 3. Racially motivated, culturally bolstered, personally vindicated
 - a. Who has harmed you greatly in your life?
 - b. How would you respond if God showed them mercy?
- b. What is at the root of Jonah's sinful response?
 - i. Self-Righteousness: He deserves God's mercy and Nineveh doesn't
 1. He is Jewish - note the "my country" in 4:2
 2. The Ninevites violently and brutally harmed him and his people
 3. He is not a "sinner" like them!
 - a. Big sins vs. Little sins
 - b. Is the perpetrator against you less deserving of God's mercy than you?
 - ii. "God blesses people like me, not evil haters like them"
 1. Parable of the Elder Brother (Luke 15)
 2. Matthew 9:10-13 "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"
 - iii. This anger at God, rooted in self-righteousness, kept Jonah from the Ninevites
- c. Our Anger is Our Self-Righteous Judgment of God
 - i. Self-righteousness is rooted in control
 1. If I do "x,y,z", then God has to bless me and treat me well
 2. If I fail to do "x,y,z", then I don't have control over my own life and I don't trust anyone else (including God) to treat me well
 3. Anger is the natural response to losing control and not trusting God to do well
 - a. I trust my plans more than God's plans
 - b. So, I even get angry with God when He doesn't do things my way
 - ii. Self-Righteousness fails to see God rightly
 1. It brings His holiness down to an "attainable" level

- a. “God is righteous...like me”
 - b. Notice how much Jonah is talking about himself, even though he knows what God is like
 - 2. Then, it sits in judgment over God for not doing things rightly
 - a. Amazingly, he is actually deeming his own sense of righteousness as BETTER than God’s!!
 - b. He is judging God!
 - c. Our anger at God is the same: “You’re not doing it right!”
- iii. Self-Righteousness fails to see ourselves rightly
 - 1. We think ourselves wiser than God
 - 2. We think ourselves as deserving of God’s blessing
 - 3. We think ourselves good
- d. Our Anger Erupts When Somebody is Threatening Something That We Highly Value
 - i. Jonah believes that he really needs vengeance on Nineveh
 - 1. God is stopping him from getting vengeance, so he goes dramatic
 - ii. How Does God Respond?
 - 1. God asks, “Do you do well to be angry?”
 - a. “do well” indicates not merely righteousness, but rather wholeness or health or skill
 - b. God is asking if Jonah’s heart is healthy and whole, the way it is supposed to be
 - 2. Jonah doesn’t answer God’s questions, but merely runs away (again) to the east of the city (farther from Israel, btw)
 - iii. Jonah believes that he really needs comfort from the heat
 - 1. God ask him the same questions, “do you do well to be angry about the plant?”
 - 2. Jonah now answers, “Of course!”
 - a. He sees it as entirely appropriate to want to die when his plant disappears
 - b. He sees it as healthy and whole living, the way it’s supposed to be
 - 3. Self-Righteousness deceives us into believing lies, enslaving us to the whims of our flesh until we spiral down into despair, depression, and joylessness
 - a. See Galatians 4:8-15 “What has happened to all your joy?”
 - b. Legalistic self-righteousness saps the joy out of our lives and enslaves us to guilt-ridden condemnation by a small view of Jesus

2. What Do We Do?

- a. Recognize that it is never right to be angry with God
 - i. Anger with God is self-righteous and accuses God of evil
 - ii. Let us recognize the arrogance of our anger toward Him and call it what it is: unbelieving arrogant sin and let us fight against it with ferocity!
- b. Don’t run away from God when you don’t understand Him and are angry
 - i. GOD HANDLES EVEN OUR ANGER AT HIM WITH GRACE
 - 1. Look how patient God is with Jonah, asking him questions rather than pounding him down with Scripture
 - 2. This is the Good Counselor!!
 - ii. There is a propriety in speaking directly to God rather than speaking about God (we will see this in greater detail in Habakkuk)
 - 1. Usually when we’re angry, with God or someone else, we talk about them more than we talk to them

2. This never moves us in the direction of reconciliation, rest, or peace because anger hardens our hearts in self-righteousness and “the root of bitterness springs up and defiles many” (Heb 12:15)
 3. WE are not healed of our sinful unbelief when we do not turn to the LORD
- c. Ask God to help you see yourself rightly
- i. Self-righteousness is rooted in an erroneous view of our own goodness
 - ii. Matthew 18:21ff – the parable of the wicked servant
 1. Recognize the great gift of grace that God has shown you in Christ
 2. You were a debtor deserving of punishment, but instead was shown tremendous mercy by God
 3. Remembering the great debt which we owed and which Christ paid down by His humiliating incarnation and death keeps us humble in regards to other sinners
 4. This remembrance also reorients our view of God, too
 - iii. Always start with your own need for change in the moment
 1. Ask Him to help you trust Him and to see His goodness
 2. Ask Him to transform your heart into a deeper appreciation of His love (Eph 3) so that you can walk in humble strength (Eph 4)
- d. Ask God to help you see Him rightly
- i. Our anger with God is based upon a lack of trust, i.e. we do not believe He is good
 1. We don't fully trust that God is good, right, wise, loving, or faithful
 - a. Usually our view of Him is predicated upon our lack of wisdom, love, faithfulness, etc.
 - b. We imagine Him, wrongly, as being human
 2. We can ask Him to reveal His holiness to us so that we know Him more and more and grow in our trust of Him
 - a. His love is a holy love, different than our
 - b. His wisdom is a holy wisdom, different than ours
 - c. Etc.
 3. Remember the two halves of the gospel of Jesus:
 - a. I am so sinful that Jesus had to come down from heaven and die for me
 - b. I am so deeply loved that Jesus did come down from heaven and die for me
 - c. The question is always: “What am I valuing more than God and more than people?”
 - ii. Our understanding of God must come from His self-revelation in His Word
 1. God has acted within history to show us who He is
 2. Let us learn to reorient our perceptions of Him around His own revelation, rather than our own imagination and perceived wisdom
 - iii. When we see God rightly, we can wrestle with Him and still trust Him
 1. Psalm 13 – “How long, O Lord, will you hide your face from me?...I trust in your steadfast love, and my heart will rejoice in your salvation”
 2. See Habakkuk's initial question “How long will I cry for help and you do not hear or save?” and his final stanza, “Though the fig tree not blossom and there is no fruit on the vines...yet I will rejoice in the Lord, the God of my salvation
- e. Remember the Gospel to see God's goodness
- i. It is safe to repent of our anger toward God even when our feelings have not changed

1. Simply because we feel something does not imply its righteousness or goodness
2. Preach the gospel of grace to ourselves again!
 - a. “For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not out of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one can boast.” (Eph 2:8-9)
 - i. We are saved, not on the basis of work or the basis of our pedigree or the basis of the perfection of our faith, repentance, or obedience, but upon the basis of the blood of Jesus who died our death
 - b. “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13)
- ii. Run to Jesus for help to change
 1. He sympathizes with us as High Priest (Hebrews 4:15), and He knows your weaknesses and struggles
 2. He loves and closes to the brokenhearted and those who know that they are sinners in desperate need of grace (Matt 9:10-17; Luke 15:2)
 3. He has poured out His Holy Spirit for our good and for our transformation into His image (Acts 2:33; John 14:16ff; 2 Cor 3:18)
- iii. “He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

Conclusion:

Our anger at God is sinful because it is self-righteous and haughty. This is not to deny the pain or the struggle that we may experience with God working out His wisdom, but it is to deny that our flesh would be more right to do it our way. Anger at God keeps us from sharing the good news of what God has done in Jesus and all that it means to the world because it is self-righteous and haughty. It keeps us from joy and from growing in grace. Anger at God is seriously harmful to our souls because it deglories the Glorious One.

So, what do we do when God doesn't make sense to us? Look to Jesus and humbly satisfy your soul with God. That seems counterintuitive...because it is counterintuitive to the self-righteous heart. Only when our souls are deeply satisfied in God will our questions and our doubts be assuaged by the grandeur of His glorious grace towards us in His Son. Only when we perceive the depths of His love in the light of our own heinous sin will our redemption at the expense of the life of God's unique Son electrify our hearts to rejoice and to proclaim to the world that God is truly magnificent! For we were dead in our rebellion and our sins, moving about in selfish lusts of our flesh and were, in our very nature, children of wrath, like our worst enemies. But God is merciful to us in Christ, raising us from the deadness of our sins and placing us in the heavenlies with Jesus so that He might show the remarkable riches of His grace and unsurpassing kindness to us in Christ for all eternity. It is in beholding the great mercy shown to us that we will see rightly both ourselves and our God so that we are moved to the humble boldness of the gospel that preaches salvation to the world, even to our greatest enemies, to the glory of God alone.

Amen