

## Is it Right for You to be Angry?

Jonah 3:10-4:11 (EHV)

<sup>10</sup> When God saw their actions, that they had turned from their evil way, God relented from the disaster which he said he would bring on them, and he did not carry it out. <sup>1</sup> But to Jonah all this seemed very bad, and he became very angry. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the LORD, "LORD, wasn't this exactly what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I previously fled to Tarshish, because I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abounding in mercy, and you relent from sending disaster. <sup>3</sup> So now, LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." <sup>4</sup> But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?" <sup>5</sup> Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city. He made a shelter for himself there and sat in the shade under it, waiting to see what would happen in the city. <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD God provided a plant and made it grow up over Jonah to provide shade over his head, to relieve him from his discomfort. So Jonah was very happy about the plant. <sup>7</sup> But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, and it attacked the plant so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, so he said, "It is better for me to die than to live." <sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" Jonah said, "I do have a right to be angry—angry enough to die!" <sup>10</sup> So the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant. You did not work for it or make it grow. It grew up in one night and perished after one night. <sup>11</sup> So should I not be concerned for Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left—and also many animals?"

Can you remember the last time you got really angry? Think about that moment. What caused it? In reflecting on it, were you right to be angry?

There are two instances of someone being angry in our Bible readings for today. The first is Jonah. Why is he angry? Because "When God saw [the actions of the Ninevites], that they had turned from their evil way, God relented from the disaster which he said he would bring on them, and he did not carry it out. But to Jonah all this seemed very bad, and he became very angry. He prayed to the LORD, 'LORD, wasn't this exactly what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I previously fled to Tarshish, because I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abounding in mercy, and you relent from sending disaster. So now, LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.'" (3:10-4:3) Jonah was angry enough to request his own death because God relented on destroying the Ninevites.

It might be hard to relate to Jonah being angry over sinners repenting, but look at it this way. The Assyrians, which Nineveh was its capital, were violent people. They would probably kill you rather than look at you. If they prospered now, they then posed a continuing threat to Israel and its people. It would be kind of like a missionary going and preaching a message of judgment to Al-Qaeda or ISIS. How many of us would be skeptical at a mass conversion in that scenario? How many of us would still want to see these terrorist groups pay for what they have done, for their heinous crimes, their violent killing of non-combatant civilians? Would it make you angry if God never punished them in any way for their acts of terrorism and violence?

And if you still can't relate to that, maybe you can relate to the angry people in Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard. A landowner goes out at the beginning of the day and hires people to work a 12-hour day for the wage of a denarius. The landowner doesn't stop there, though; he keeps going out at different hours of the workday hiring people at the same wage rate. When it comes time for the workers to get paid at the end of the day, those who only worked the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, an hour or less, get paid a denarius. If you had been someone who sweat and broke his back for 12 full hours that day, you would probably get a smile on your face knowing that you are about to get paid even more than what you were promised because if this guy who only put in one hour of work got a denarius, how much more are my 12 hours worth?! Then the landowner gave those who worked 12 hours the same paycheck, one denarius. Of course they were upset. They said, "Those who were last worked one hour, and you made them equal to us who have endured the burden of the day and the scorching heat!" (Matthew 20:12) That's not fair.

And you would probably cry out the same thing. If you put in more work, if you follow all the rules, if you are honest and never cheat, if you keep all the laws, pay your taxes, get all your homework done on time, how do you feel when others get a better deal? How do you feel that when you work above and beyond your hired responsibilities and yet the person who slacks off and skips days at work gets a raise and promoted ahead of you? How do you feel when you study nearly every waking hour of the day and someone else who blows off all their classes gets the full ride scholarship while you have to struggle to scrape money together to go to a local college? It's not fair. It makes me angry!

Now what about when God does something like this? If you've been a Christian most of your life, struggled hard, carried your cross, given up Sunday mornings and promotions and fun opportunities because you put God first, and then you realize that there are people indulging in just about every conceivable sin who then repent on their deathbed and they get the same forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven you do – how does that make you feel? How does it make you feel knowing that there will be prostitutes, murderers, terrorists, rapists, and pedophiles who will be in heaven when you get there? Does that make you angry?

“Is it right for you to be angry?” (verse 4) The LORD confronted Jonah with this question. Was it right for Jonah to be angry that God relented on sending disaster and punishment upon the wicked and violent people of Nineveh?

To lead Jonah and us to an answer, the LORD provided an object lesson. While Jonah was sitting from a distance east of the city of Nineveh, “the LORD God provided a plant and made it grow up over Jonah to provide shade over his head, to relieve him from his discomfort. So Jonah was very happy about the plant.” (verse 6) Then God provided a worm who did what worms do, ate the plant, and the plant withered. After that, God provided a scorching east wind combined with a beating hot sun. It was so hot that Jonah grew faint and reiterated his desire that it was better for him to die than to live. Jonah was that angry that his shade was taken away and that God was not going to bring disaster on the Ninevites. He was thoroughly convinced that he had every right to be angry.

But, “is it right for you to be angry?” (verse 4) The LORD explained to Jonah that Jonah had nothing to do with providing the plant that gave him shade. God provided it, and then God took it away. God made it happen. God gave Jonah shade because he was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy to Jonah. These are God's riches that he has the right to do with them whatever he pleases. This is grace and mercy. Grace is undeserved love, meaning that there is nothing that we did, nothing about us, nothing about Jonah, nothing about the Ninevites that merited or caused this love. And mercy is treating people in a positive way that they don't deserve. The very definition of mercy is that it cannot be in any way, shape, or form a result of something that the person did or will do. It is mercy specifically because it's not how someone should be treated – like paying people who worked 1 hour the same as those who worked 12 hours. In other words, grace and mercy are, by definition, not fair.

Grace and mercy are not fair, and that is the greatest news any of us can ever receive! It was out of grace that God provided a Savior for us when we were the guilty party, when we deserved nothing but eternal separation from God and to be locked away forever in the torments of hell. That's what we deserve. That's what would be fair to us because we are the sinners. We are no better than the violent Ninevites or the murderers or the terrorists or the rapists or the pedophiles. All of us have fallen short of the glory of God. But out of undeserved love, by grace, God did not leave us helplessly separated from him. In fact, by his grace, he did to himself what was unfair. He gave up heaven, came down, took on human flesh, and lived under his own law to complete it for us, lived how we should have lived. He sacrificed his perfect, sin-free life on the cross in place of ours, suffered what we should have suffered. Because of this, he has mercy on us - treats us not as we deserve. He has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. He clothes us with Christ's perfection and gives us the inheritance of heaven – no matter our sins. Grace and mercy have given us everlasting benefits that we do not in any way, shape, or form deserve or have a right to. On top of that, God continues operating by his grace and mercy to give us what we need every day. He blesses us with family and friends. He blesses us with homes and food on the table, cars to get to places, strength to work and study. We don't deserve any of these things, but God gives them to us.

God's grace and mercy are not fair in the strict sense that we deserve them. It's not fair that God did not punish the Ninevites after Jonah preached to them. It's not fair that God has not punished us immediately for our sins. It's not fair that he relented and gave us himself, graciously and mercifully, in order to save us from our sins, to give us life everlasting in heaven. Instead of being angry over this, it's time to rejoice! I have no right at all to be angry at God for being gracious and merciful. It's because of his grace and his mercy that I have a confident hope in my future, that I, like the Ninevites, will be saved and live in heaven – not because of anything I have done, but entirely by what God has done for me out of his grace and mercy.

Because God is gracious and merciful not just to me but to all people, I have no right to be angry when he gives wicked, violent people more time to know his grace and mercy as displayed through Jesus Christ. I have no right to be angry when God blesses someone else in ways that he hasn't blessed me because it is entirely God's right to be gracious and merciful in the way that he knows is best. When my anger rises, I have to let it go. I have no right to it because God has been gracious and merciful to me. It was all undeservedly and freely given. How can I withhold that same grace and mercy to anyone else?

Thank God that he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy, loving me and you undeservedly and not treating us as we deserve to be treated. Help us all, Lord, to rid ourselves of anger because we have no right to it. Instead, help us to share your grace and mercy with everyone, no matter who they are or what they have done. Amen.