

Anger Management

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[0 : 00] So if you would please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word this morning.

! Jonah chapter 3 verse 10 through chapter 4 verse 11.! 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. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 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. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

And the Lord said, Do you do well to be angry? Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade till he should see what would become of the city. Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah so that it might shade over his head to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, It is better for me to die than to live. But God said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry for the plant? And he said, Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die. And the Lord said, You pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle? May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? Back in Kansas, I had a mentor, and he had pastored his church for over 40 years, nearly 50 years this man had pastored the same church. And so I always enjoyed our time together, and especially whenever we were going to travel to conferences together. And I had an opportunity to pick his mind and just hear from years of experience as a pastor. And I remember this one story he told me. I don't remember the conversation that brought it about, but something to deal with difficult people in the church, difficult situations in the church. And then he proceeded to tell me the story of a business meeting that he once was a part of at his church. And he said that there was an argument between two older ladies in the congregation.

One was sitting in front of the other one. And he said the argument led to one of those old ladies spitting into the hair of the other old ladies. And I just had this shocked expression. I couldn't believe it. I thought he was pulling my leg. But sure enough, he said, oh yeah. It was a dirty, nasty business meeting and night that evening at the church. And so I couldn't help but wonder, well, what would cause a person to spit in the hair of another in church? And he said to me that he didn't know. He couldn't remember what had caused the problem, but he certainly remembered the fight.

We have a business meeting next Sunday, so don't anybody get any ideas, right? Let's please avoid that at all costs. Keep your spit to yourself. That's disgusting. But oftentimes in the church setting, our anger doesn't accomplish nearly what we hope that it will, but actually makes matters worse. And it makes you look foolish in the process. Jonah has been through quite an ordeal.

[4 : 44] If you remember, God called him to go and to preach to the people of Nineveh, but Jonah chose to go his own way, and so he disobeyed God. Then while Jonah was in the ship, if you remember, he was headed in the opposite direction of where God had called him to go. And so God sent a storm, and God was able to use that storm to get the sailors to lead them to repentance, but also to get Jonah redirected on the right course. And so they throw Jonah overboard. God appoints a fish that comes and swallows him up, and then he's in the belly of that fish for three days before finally he arrives on the shores of Nineveh, and he's vomited out. But Jonah has changed, if you

remember. He's in that moment, in the belly of the fish, he's repented. He's asked for God's forgiveness. He realized that salvation belongs to the Lord, and he knows that he must go and preach to the Ninevites as God had called him to do. And so he goes, and they repent, and they experience a city-wide revival. Everyone in the city repents and seeks the Lord's forgiveness. Everyone is crying out to the Lord for salvation, and God, in his mercy, in his grace, chooses to forgive them. Now, this seems like a great place to end the story, doesn't it? In fact, many children's books written about Jonah end it right there, or they end it with Jonah going to Nineveh. As a matter of fact, we have some family in town, and Danny was reading this story from a children's book to them, and it ended with Jonah going to the city of Nineveh. And that was it. And I think, wow, that would be a great way to end the story, right? There's Jonah, or actually at least seeing him go to Nineveh, the people repent, and then if we could have this kind of Walt Disney ending where Jonah is going headed back to Nineveh, and the sun is setting, and God spells out, and they all live happily ever after with the clouds in the sky.

That's the way we think that this story should end, but it doesn't end that way. Just when we think that Jonah has finally learned his lesson, we come to chapter four, the last chapter in this book, and we see that God has yet another lesson for Jonah. And really, it's the same lesson that God has been trying to teach to him from chapter one, verse one. And now he's going to press this lesson deeply into the heart of his disobedient prophet. This is a message that we also need God to press deeply into our heart today as well. Like Jonah, we've been given a mission from God, right? Matthew 28, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, of the Holy Spirit. We are commanded by God to go on this special mission. But like Jonah, we have been given a mission, excuse me, and a message from the Lord, and it's to go to lost people.

However, again, like Jonah, we have often failed to share in the love that God has for lost people. Like those two little old ladies who were duking it out in that sanctuary so long ago and spitting all over each other in the house of God because they were angry about something that has been long forgotten, we, like them and like Jonah, allow our anger to get in the way of our mission to preach God's message to the lost people whom God loves so very much. In this passage of Scripture, God deals with Jonah's anger, and so that is what I want us to dig into today, that the Holy Spirit would expose some feelings that you might be harboring in your heart, feelings that are interrupting and plaguing the mission that God has called you to go upon and the message that he's given us and commanded us to share.

So when we come to chapter 4 and read verses 1, 3, and 4, we see very clearly that Jonah is angry with God. Let's look again. In verse 4-1, the people repent, but it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

And then verses 3-5, and he said, therefore, O Lord, please take my life. And he has this conversation with God about his anger. We see that Jonah is very, very upset.

[9 : 18] His anger is boiling, and it comes down to the fact that he thinks he knows better than God. Jonah is angry because he isn't going to get his way, and he's pouting because he realizes that there's nothing he can do about it. If you've grown up and you've grown up in the church, you've probably, like me, you've heard the story of Jonah more times than you can remember, right?

This is one that we hear from all the way in, we were little kids in Sunday school, all the way up until being adults in church on Sunday morning and hearing a pastor preach about it. You've probably heard the story over and over and over again.

You may have even gone to Branson and saw it reenacted for you at that Sight and Sound Theater like I have. You are very familiar with this story. So many of us, because we're so familiar with the story, we come to this portion of Scripture, and we can be desensitized to just how shocking Jonah's response is to what is taking place in Nineveh.

An entire city filled with 120,000 people have repented and have sought God's forgiveness. So let's just try to understand that by putting it into a perspective that maybe we can better comprehend. In Bartlesville, there's about 36,000 people. In Washington County, there's about 52,000 people. There's about 110,000 people living in the Washington, Nowata, Craig, and Ottawa counties combined.

[10 : 54] That's a large junction of northeast Oklahoma, is it not? And that's less than the 120,000 people who came to repentance that day in Nineveh.

Could you imagine how much rejoicing there would be in the church if we saw that section of our state? Everybody in it coming to faith in Jesus Christ?

We would be rejoicing. Heaven would be rejoicing. Look at Luke 15, 7 with me. Just so I tell you, Jesus says, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

So can you imagine the party that they're having in heaven this day? As 120,000 people are coming to salvation? Much rejoicing.

But Jonah isn't happy. Jonah has gone from running from God, as we saw, to then running with God.

[11:56] As a result of that, Nineveh had been turned upside down or right side up, we should say. But he was so self-centered. He was so self-serving.

He was so self-righteous and so angry with God that he couldn't stand to bear to see this city that he hated so much come to salvation.

And so his response is to leave, to go away, and to pout about what was happening. Here's the thing. The thing that we learned from Jonah and the thing that we can apply to ourselves and our churches today.

It's this. It is possible to be involved in and busy with religious activity, but still have little care, concern, or love for the lost people whom God has called us to reach.

Another thing we can learn from reading this book is that saving lost people is not hard for God to do. It's not hard for God to save lost people.

[13:07] As we saw last week, Jonah is the world's worst missionary. He didn't want to go. And he hated the people that God was sending him to go to. He was the world's worst missionary, yet God was able to use him in an amazing way.

There were certainly other people who God could have called, who God could have sent. But he had a purpose in making sure that Jonah was his man for this mission.

And so we have this lesson that the issue isn't with God being able to save lost people, but the issue is with God getting his people to love lost people like he does.

That's the problem. That's the lesson that we need to learn. And again, isn't that the message that God is trying to proclaim to us throughout this whole book?

Just a small section of it is spent on the Ninevites coming to repentance and faith and being saved. But most of the book is God dealing with his wayward, selfish, self-centered prophet.

[14:12] This book is primarily focused on God getting his man to have his heart. It hasn't gotten any less difficult today for God to get his people to love lost people.

It's still an issue. There's no issue with God. God doesn't struggle with being able to save people. But the struggle is with getting his people who have been saved to love those like him who haven't yet been saved.

So Jonah is angry. And he's angry because God's mission for him has taken him outside of his comfort zone. When we moved down to Bartlesville from Lansing, from our home up there, we had to prepare, you know, for the move.

And we wanted to make sure that we could get all of our stuff into one truck. And so that meant that we had a large garage sale. And it meant that we did a lot of decluttering, throwing a lot of stuff out, selling a lot of things.

And so unfortunately for me, that meant that I had to make the sacrifice of my recliner. And so I sold our recliner.

[15:26] And I was willing to see how much I love you, that I would sell the recliner to come down for you all. Amen? Amen? So I was so happy last weekend to see that Big Lots was having a sale.

And that we were getting ready to move into our new house. And I got the go-ahead from my lovely wife to replace the old recliner. And so now I feel at peace again at my home.

I have my little comfort zone. So I have my recliner. And it's in perfect view of the TV. And I've got a little table here to put my books and my remotes and my dirty dishes and things like that.

It's my little comfort zone. That's my little spot in the house. But what I've realized and been convicted of this week since I've got that comfort zone back is how if I'm asked to do anything, it's as simple as taking the garbage out or helping Danny change a dirty diaper or something like that. I act like she's asking me to do calculus homework or something like that. Are you serious? I'm in my comfort zone right now. I couldn't possibly be bothered with things like that.

[16 : 38] We love to be in comfort, don't we? And we hate it when anybody messes with our comfort and gets in the way of us being in our comfort zone.

But here's the thing. God doesn't mind. God doesn't mind interrupting us and taking us out of our comfort zone. In fact, he seeks to do that. He often threatens our comfort.

And again, this should come as no surprise to us. Look at Matthew chapter 10 with me. And Jesus says, Do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it.

[17 : 45] And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. That's something that doesn't sound very comfortable to hear, does it? What is Jesus saying here? Am I supposed to hate my parents and my in-laws?

No. But what he's saying is that your relationship with him will have an effect on every other relationship that you have. And by comparison, your love and affection and devotion to the Lord, it should look like all your other relationships pale in comparison to how much you're willing to follow him.

And we see, in many cultures, becoming a Christian means that you will be set at odds within your own household. You will be kicked out of your home. You will be disowned by your parents.

So Jesus is saying that your relationship with me will have an effect on you. And it will and can create some very uncomfortable situations. And what else is he asking? He's saying here that his expectation and his commandment of us is that we would fully surrender to him completely and totally.

That we would abandon our own will and instead follow his. He doesn't say that these sacrifices are going to be easy for us. But he does say that it's going to be worth it.

[19 : 03] Oh man, it will be worth it. And isn't this exactly what Jesus did for us? Philippians 2 verses 3 through 11. The Apostle Paul writes, Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interest of others. Have this mind among yourself, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant.

Being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

How much he loves us. I was reading in a book, *The Imperfect Disciple* by Jared C. Wilson. I came across this quote that I think hammers this home even more clearly to us.

[20 : 28] I want to read it for you. He says, Jesus' major contribution to the world was not a set of aphorisms. He was born in a dirty barn, grew up in a dirty world, got baptized in a muddy river.

He put his hands on oozing wounds of lepers. He let prostitutes brush his hair and soldiers pull it out. He went to dinner with dirt bags, both religious and irreligious.

His closest friends were a collection of crude fishermen and cultural traitors. He felt the spittle of the Pharisees on his face and the metal hooks of the jailer's whips in the flesh of his back.

He got sweaty and dirty and bloody, and he took all of the sin and the mess of the world unto himself. And to the cross, which we nailed him to.

In 2 Corinthians 5.21, it says, For our sake, he made him who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[21 : 34] Jesus has done this for us. So do we ever have any right to be angry with him? Never. Never.

Have we any right to shield our comfort and refuse the mission that he's given us? Never. God takes us out of our comfort zone so that we will become more like Christ.

There's a purpose in this. God has a plan for our suffering. He's going to use it to make us more like Christ. Jack, my son, hates the doctor.

Hates the doctor. And he hates the doctor because when he goes to the doctor's office, he gets shots. And he's terrified of shots. I mean, I couldn't illustrate it enough for you guys to truly understand how much this kid goes hysterical inside of a doctor's office.

And so we've always got to tell him, you know, beforehand we've got to prepare him for the news that he's going to the doctor. And his first question is, am I going to get shots? And so one time we were pretty confident that he wasn't going to get shots because he had shots before and, you know, the nurse had said he's up to date, right?

[22 : 54] He doesn't need shots until he's X number of years. It was years down the line. And we get into the doctor's office and this nurse has no idea the patient that she's dealing with. And she should have whispered it into our ears or something to help us prepare him.

But she says, oh, yeah, he's got to have like four shots today. Wow, he went crazy. I mean, he went crazy. I was like, who is this kid, you know? I'm going to have to exercise this demon that has flown into the body of my son.

And I kid you not, he was weeping and wailing. And you know what he was saying? Why, God, why? Why, God, why? He's crying out to God in the doctor's office. And I'm trying to calm him down and trying to say, hey, you know, this is good for you.

This is going to help you. He doesn't understand any of that. So, you know what we had to do? I had to restrain him. I had to push him down, hold him down while he's screaming and he's crying out to God.

And then the nurse quickly sticks him four times. And it's painful as a parent to see your kid go through that, right?

[24 : 01] But, you know, what I'm trying to say to him, what I know that he doesn't know is, yeah, shots hurt. Nobody wants to get a shot. But that pain, that suffering has the potential to save your life from an illness, from a disease that without this temporary pain you could die.

And so sometimes when we think about our own suffering, we are like, you know, Jack, like a child in the doctor's office. Why, God, why? Why would you allow this to happen to me?

But he's saving you for something much better. He is saving you. He is making you more like his son, Jesus Christ. And who more would you like to be than Jesus Christ?

When you were saved, you were sanctified at your conversion. And yet at the same time, we undergo this process of sanctification in our lives. Sanctification, from the Greek word, it means holiness or separation.

We are being separated for holiness unto God. And the Bible says that at the moment of your conversion, God granted you justification once and for all.

[25 : 17] Positionally, you were made holy in Christ. But now as we go on from that day, God is guiding us. He is maturing us. He is progressively making us more like his son, growing in holiness into the future when we are with God and we will be made completely and ultimately holy like him.

And so the Christian life goes something like this. You were saved and then it's kind of like a stair step or a zigzag. But it should always be progressing upwards. Yeah, we have setbacks. Yeah, we have struggles. We endure suffering.

But there's all a point to it and it's God using this to make us more like his son, Jesus Christ. And isn't the purpose of Christianity to follow Christ?

We are called to follow Christ. We want to be like him. But in order for us to grow, we must be willing to sacrifice our comfort for the greater experience of becoming like Jesus Christ.

So here in verse 2, we see that Jonah, he's angry, but he takes his anger to the Lord. And he takes his anger to the Lord in prayer.

[26 : 29] And it says, and Jonah prayed to the Lord and he said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country that this is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish? For I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

You know, we've given Jonah a lot of hard time and rightfully so, but here Jonah gets it right. He deals with his anger correctly.

He takes his anger to God. Instead of running from God because he's angry, he comes to God in prayer with his frustrations. All of us can probably say that at some point in our relationship with

God, we've been frustrated by the circumstances, by the situations surrounding our lives that God has seemingly led us into, and we've gotten angry about that.

We've gotten angry that God didn't fix it, that God didn't change it, or that God would allow something like this to happen to us, and we think that's not fair.

Jonah is angry. And Jonah, again, he thinks he knows more than God, which he obviously doesn't. But we get angry too.

[27 : 45] We get angry with God, and thankfully for us, he wants to hear what's troubling us. He wants to know what we're upset about and frustrated with.

And he already knows, doesn't he? It's not going to come as any surprise to God when we go to him and we're upset. You know, God, I'm kind of upset about this. Oh, I didn't know that. Why didn't you say something?

He knows. So why should we hide from him things that he already knows about? Go to God when you're angry and upset in prayer. That's the best thing that you can do.

And then we see that God teaches Jonah a lesson about his anger in verses 5 through 11. Jonah was perfectly okay with God being gracious to him, but he was unwilling to accept the fact that God could be gracious to people who he didn't think deserved it.

The Ninevites, as we've talked about, they were terrible people. They were awful people. They were the enemies of the Jewish people. They were a threat to Jonah and to his nation and to his family.

[28 : 56] In Jonah's mind, they were what was wrong with the world, right? In Jonah's mind, he would have been thinking if we just could get rid of these Ninevites, the world would be a better place.

You ever catch yourself thinking like that? You know, if we could just get rid of this group of people from our neighborhood, from our city, from our state, from our nation, things would be so much better.

That's the way Jonah is thinking. And I also think that he's embarrassed. I think he's embarrassed by the call and the mission that God has given him to do, and I think he's embarrassed by the results.

He's going to have to go back to Israel, and he's going to have to go back and report to them that, guess what, guys? I know we hate these people, and I know that we've been praying for their destruction, but God had me go, and they're saved now.

And they might show up in our church, right? And they might sit in your pew, and that's going to be awkward for you because then you're going to have to come to them and say, you know, could you please get out of my pew?

[30 : 00] That's my spot, right? Let's pretend like we don't do that in church because we do, and it's tragic. But Jonah hates these people, and I think he's embarrassed by what God has done.

Jonah doesn't think these people deserve God's grace, and here's the thing. That doesn't make any sense because grace is never deserved. Grace is never earned.

It ceases to be grace if it's given because it's deserved or because it's earned. Of course the Ninevites didn't deserve grace. But here's the thing.

Neither did we. Neither did we. Jonah wasn't chosen to be a prophet for God because he earned it. He didn't deserve it.

But Jonah had forgotten. He'd forgotten that. And so God is going to teach him a lesson. And through this lesson, he will expose his deep-seated anger and his hatred, in his heart, towards people whom God loves.

[31 : 06] And so God's going to teach him this lesson by using a visual aid. And so he appoints a plant. And the point of the plant is to expose to Jonah that Jonah loves plants more than he loves people.

How tragic. When God's man, who's been given God's message to go to a lost people and declare this message, has been given him a mission, and here's Jonah seeing them come to repentance, caring nothing for them, but upset that this plant that he loved is gone.

God was teaching Jonah a lesson. And his point was very clear. We see in verses 10 through 11, Jonah, he's basically saying, you have more compassion and you have more love in your heart for a plant.

That was here today and gone tomorrow. And over there in that city, it's filled with people. That if I hadn't sent you with this message, their eternal souls would be damned forever.

And you care more about this than them? That's a problem. Here's the thing I want us to see. Satan will do whatever he can do to get us off God's mission for us.

[32 : 36] He will seek to divide us, right? Causing us to be angry about things that we spit on each other for, that we forget years down the line. He will try to disqualify us by having us be trapped and involved in sin that's exposed, that discredits us from our work in the church.

He will try to distract us with stuff and making us feel too comfortable to be able to leave that comfort zone and not go on the mission that God has called us to go upon.

If we are to, as a church, take seriously the mission and message that God has given us to share, then we've got to be faithful to God's word.

And if we do that, we can trust that God will be faithful to us and he will bless our efforts for sure.

But in order for that to happen, we've got to love people like God does.

And that's what he's trying to tell us here, isn't it? Love lost people like I love them, like I love you.

And as a church, if we can develop the heart for God, a heart for lost people like God does, a heart for each other, God will not only be a blessing to this church, this church will be a blessing to this community.

[34 : 06] But I want you to understand that this is a serious issue. If you're angry with God, it's a serious problem that must be dealt with.

And I think maybe another question you have is, well, as a Christian, Pastor Mike, is it ever okay for me to be angry? Or should I just be a doormat for people to walk over and let them do whatever they want?

Now certainly there are things going on in this world that we need to be more upset about and more angry about as Christians than we are. All the injustices that we see taking place, the atrocities that we see happening in our communities, in our schools even, we should stand against those things and be angry and do something about it.

But here's the deal, if you are angry in your heart and if you don't love people like God loves people, you are in a serious and perilous situation. I want you to look at Ephesians 4, 26 through 27 and then 30 and 32.

I want you to see this. He says there, Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity for the devil. So the Apostle Paul is saying this is a big deal.

[35 : 19] You and your anger. We've got to do something about it. Ephesians 4, excuse me, verses 30 through 32 and then he says, And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you.

So yes, there are things in this world that we must be angry about. However, even righteous anger can lead to bitterness, to resentment, and to self-righteousness.

And if we don't take our anger to the Lord but allow it to fester in our hearts, then you will give the devil an opportunity to use it not for God's purposes but for his.

If anger is prolonged, it will lead you to seek and to desire vengeance and Satan will court your anger and he will feed it through things like self-pity, through things like pride, and every sort of other self-centered sin that violates God's will and makes you look foolish in us as well as a result.

[36 : 36] Whatever violates God's will grieves the Holy Spirit. And we should care an awful lot about this. Shouldn't we?

The Holy Spirit of God, which you have received as a result of your conversion, living inside of you, right? Your down payment.

You've been sealed with this. And to grieve him with your sin, it's a dangerous place to be in. And God cannot use you in the ways that he wants to if the Holy Spirit is grieved with how you are anger, filled with anger and not loving the people that God has called you to love.

So in a moment, I'm going to pray. And if you are feeling that way, if as you've heard God's word preached to you, you've felt in your heart or you've been convicted that there is some person or a group of people, or maybe it's something else.

It's a situation that you've encountered and you are just really angry with God. And I will tell you, and I mean this and I say it with love, you are no good to yourself and you are no good to anybody else if that's the way that you are.

[37 : 55] And I encourage you that you would come forward, that you would pray, that you would leave it here and go from this place this morning determined that you are going to love people the way that God has loved you.