

“Angry with God” by Bob Kombe (7/28/2019)

Introduction

Good morning everyone! I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you - it's a pleasure to see you. My name is Bob - I am a Theology student at Tokyo Christian University and I'm an intern serving here at KBF.

I also want to thank many of you who said to me that you would be **praying** for me as I **prepared** for this message. And also the **encouraging emails** I've received. Those things have really served to **strengthen** me and **push me forward** as I was preparing. So thank you very much for that.

Have you ever been in a situation where you expected something to go a certain way and it didn't? Especially if you felt you were counting on **God** to make things happen - and then they don't.

And for those that are **followers of Jesus**, sometimes we'll say very **spiritual sounding** things like “God spoke to me about this.” or “I am sure God has confirmed this in my heart.”

A few years ago there was a situation that I was so sure God had spoken to me about. I would tell people “I'm sure God has spoken to me about this.”

I would say to people “There are things that I have been less sure that God has spoken to me about, and they have happened. But for this particular thing, I am more than sure.”

And so you can imagine how I felt when things turned out the opposite of what I had **expected**. I was crushed. I was embarrassed. **But more than that I was very angry** - especially at God.

Seneca an ancient Roman philosopher said we get **angry** because of **optimism**. **Optimism** or our **expectations** make us **angry**.

Now optimism isn't necessarily a bad thing but I think *Seneca's point was that **because we expect things to go a certain way we can become angry when they don't.***

And that's not to say that we shouldn't feel sad when certain things happen to us - but there is a difference between being angry and being sad.

And so for me, there was a period of time that I was so **angry** at God about my “**disappointment**” that I couldn't even **pray**.

I **jokingly** told someone during that time that “I'm finding it hard to pray because even when I pray about something - **God still goes ahead and does his own thing - and I don't like that. I don't like that at all.**”

Someone has said *true* prayer should actually align our hearts to God's heart. And not to try to force God into doing what we want.

And one of my favorite quotes on prayer by the Bible teacher Timothy Keller goes:

When we pray God gives us what we **would** have asked for - *if we knew everything that he knows.*

And that's just another way of saying that because we don't know everything that God knows.

God cannot give us everything that we ask for because oftentimes we ask from our **limited**, sometimes even **selfish** and **self-centered** perspective.

Now what I didn't know about that **disappointment** was that it was actually one of the things that would **free me up** and **allow** me to come to Japan and study Theology.

But in the moment because I lacked the **perspective** I needed, it blinded me to God's **providence** to the point that it even hindered my **prayer**.

And it's only **now** when I look back that I can **piece together** what God was trying to do - because if that other opportunity had worked out I **very likely** wouldn't be here right now.

And so one of the things I want us to think about this morning is the **disappointments**, the **setbacks**, and the **frustrations** you and I are facing in our lives.

What situations are not going the way *you* think they should go and are leading you to feelings of **frustration**, **disappointment** and **anger** against God. **Maybe** even so angry that you're finding it hard to **communicate** with God.

This leads us to our message for this morning where we meet a man named Jonah.

Background:

If you've been with us the past few weeks you know we've been in a **message series** called "**getting out of our own way**" and we've been talking about things that hinder us from moving forward in our relationship with God.

My assignment for this morning is to take a look at **Jonah chapter 4** and this will bring us to the end of this **message series** and next week we'll begin something new.

So I'll give you a quick **summary** of the story:

In chapter 1 we're told about a **prophet** - *a person who God would speak to so that he could deliver a message for God.*

God gives this prophet a **message** and says to him go to this city called **Nineveh** and to **tell the people there that God's judgement is upon them because God has seen how wicked they are.**

Now at the time, **Nineveh** was the **capital** of the **Assyrian empire**.

Historic records of their **military victories** that were **recorded by their kings** show that the Assyrians were very cruel to the nations they conquered.

And at this time the Assyrian nation was **oppressing** Jonah's nation - nation of Israel.

So we're told that Jonah doesn't like this idea of delivering this message of judgement to Nineveh. So he gets on a **ship** going to a place called **Tarshish** - which is in the **opposite direction** to the city of Nineveh.

We're told that God sends a storm and the ship that Jonah is on is caught in this storm.

Jonah tells the sailors to throw him off the ship **because he knows that this particular storm is happening because of him.**

So the sailors reluctantly throw Jonah off the ship and we're told that God sends a **large fish** to swallow Jonah and Jonah is in the belly of this fish for **three days** and three nights.

*This detail is important because it is a picture of what would happen to Jesus who was dead for three days before being brought to life by **God the Father.***

While he's in the water Jonah prays a prayer basically asking God for help...

God has **mercy** on Jonah and God commands the fish to vomit Jonah onto the shore. Jonah then goes to Nineveh and delivers the message **and we're told the whole city takes Jonah's message seriously** from the **king** right down to the **animals.**

I like how one person put it when they said: *For the whole, entire city to repent or to turn to God - was nothing short of a miracle.*

Now this makes Jonah very angry... very angry... he is furious. And that's where we catch up with Jonah in the story.

And there are **3 ideas** concerning Jonah's **anger towards God** that I would want us think about.

I want us to notice that **anger towards God**:

1. **Blinds us to God's providence:** That means it prevents us from seeing what God has provided for us.
2. **Blurs our perspective:** *In other words it prevents us from seeing **situations** clearly and objectively.*
3. **Must be processed in prayer:** The best way to deal with our anger towards God is through prayer.

So firstly anger towards blinds us to God's providence.

We can see this when we read verses 1-4, it says:

1 This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. 2 So he complained to the LORD about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! **I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people.** 3 Just kill me now, LORD! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen." 4 **The LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry about this?"** (4:1-4, NLT).

So here we are given a picture of the man Jonah who is *very upset with God.*

Bible commentators point out that most *English translations of the Bible* **don't fully express just how angry Jonah was at God.**

What we're being told here is that Jonah was "**burning with anger**" - **he was on fire**. And he thought that God's act of mercy was in fact a "**great evil**."

So this might cause us to wonder - what is really going on here. Why is Jonah so angry that after he gives this city their message of judgement, the city has this change of heart, God then has mercy on the city - why is Jonah so mad?

It's like you're a doctor and you give a sick person some medicine - and you get very, very angry when that sick person starts to get better. That's not the kind of attitude we expect from a doctor.

Well, Jonah tells us why he was so upset in the in verse 2*:

...That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people.

Jonah tells us that he ran away *because he realized that God was possibly going to be merciful to these **enemies** of his country* - and he couldn't take that chance.

Jonah says I know you are **gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love**... and that's why I didn't want to deliver your message to this city.

Janet Gaines who has written about Jonah says that:

*What we are being shown here **about God** is what God **prefers** to do. God **prefers** to be gracious, he **prefers** to be compassionate, he **prefers** to be abounding in love - God **prefers** to have mercy on people.*

In the book of Ezekiel it says:

"Do you think that I like to see wicked people die? says the Sovereign Lord. Of course not! I want them to turn from their wicked ways and live." (18:23, NLT)

*Are there people in your own life who you would rather see **punished** than **forgiven**? Maybe people that have **done bad** things to you or **said bad** things about you.*

What kind of people are you and I? Are we people that prefer to have mercy or are we people that prefer to see our enemies punished and **maybe** even destroyed?

If people were to describe you and me would they say, "Such-and-such is a gracious person, they are slow to anger, they are merciful." Or would they describe us as being vengeful and unforgiving?

My hope is that we would be a community that is known to be gracious and merciful towards one another and towards outsiders.

But Jonah wants none of it. He's thinking "I want these people to burn." In fact, he goes outside the city to wait and watch so that when God destroys the city he'll have a front row seat.

Jonah was probably thinking "*These people haven't really changed.*" "They are only *pretending* to change because they are *scared* of God's judgment." "And yet God still shows them mercy?"

If we take a closer look at the prayer Jonah prayed when he was swallowed by the fish, we can see that *even though he recognized his **own** need for mercy, Jonah was still thinking that he was better than those people in Nineveh.*

In his prayer in chapter 2, when he's in the belly of the fish Jonah says:

8 "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you... (2:8-9, NIV).

He was saying "Yes God, I need your help. But **those pagans** have idols - they don't deserve your help."

Jonah had seen that **he needed help from God** but there was still some **pride** left in his heart that prevented him from **extending** the same grace to others.

In Jonah's mind you have to *deserve* the grace of God before you can get it.

And that's where Jonah's understanding of God was wrong. *We cannot deserve God's grace. We cannot even earn God's grace. God gives his grace freely to whoever he pleases.*

In **Exodus 33:19** God says:

...For I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose

By *definition* God's **grace** is his goodness and his mercy to those who have no reason to **deserve it** or to **expect it**.

And that's the thing about God - he is merciful... but at the same time God is just. That means that because God is Perfect he cannot just ignore sin and wrongdoing.

God has made a way to be merciful to sinners... and at the same time to still be able to punish our wrongdoing.

God sent his Son Jesus to earth as a human being. And Jesus was put to death in our place so that you and I would not have to be punished by God - Jesus took God's punishment for us.

And we're told that everyone who believes in Jesus and his death for the payment of our sin and wrongdoing... receives eternal forgiveness from God for their wrongdoing.

And if you're here this morning and you haven't made the step to trust in Jesus for your sin - I would urge you to take the step because as Christians we believe that your eternity is based upon this decision to trust Jesus.

And so all this time Jonah is failing to see that it was this **mercy of God** that saved him when he was in the belly of the fish - **he was blinded to God's providence.**

How often has our anger **towards God and others** prevented us from seeing how kind God has been to us?

How often does our anger prevent us from **remembering** how **gracious** and **merciful**, and **generous** God has been to us - so we can extend that same grace and mercy to others?

If we look further we notice that there are a few more things that God provided for Jonah that Jonah was blinded from seeing:

So Jonah went outside the city to **sit** and **wait** to see what will happen to the city.

In verse 6 we're told:

6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." 9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead." (NLT).

In verses 6-8: *I want us to notice the recurring words "God provided."*

- I want us to notice that God not only appoints the **good things**... but also the **uncomfortable** things in Jonah's situation.

And **the reason God appoints these things is in order to shine a light on Jonah's heart problem.** Because the problem is the *attitude* that Jonah has in his heart.

God is trying to show Jonah that the **God of the Bible** isn't just for Jonah and *his kind of people*.

But he is a God who is open to receive every kind of person - **even the people you consider your enemies.**

And so we are told of **3 things** that God provides for Jonah. **In verse 6**, God provides a **leafy plant** that grows and gives Jonah shade at the place he has decided to sit and wait.

In **verse 7**, God provides a **worm** that eats through the stem of Jonah's plant so that the plant eventually dies.

And then in **verse 8**, God provides a **hot wind** and **the sun** so that it burns on Jonah's head.

And finally Jonah can't take it anymore and he says "**Death is certainly better than living like this**" (8b, NLT).

And this is the **second time** in this chapter when Jonah is saying he would rather be dead.

I submit to you that when we **respond like this to situations** it is because we are **failing to see that God is working in the midst of our circumstances.**

Oftentimes all we want is a way out of our uncomfortable situation.

I can hear God say, "No Jonah. This isn't about you dying *physically*. It's about you dying *spiritually* to pride and your prejudice."

“I still need you to be physically alive Jonah, so you can carry out the plans I have for you.” “But I need you to die your self-centredness and to your pride.”

Could it be that God has assigned those **good things** and even the **uncomfortable things** in our lives to reveal the true nature of our hearts?

Could it be that God is saying to us here that “I am trying to loosen your grip on these material things so that I can show what is of true and eternal value.”

Where in our own lives are we placing more importance on temporary and material things and failing to notice things that are of eternal importance.

The next thing I want us to notice is that anger against God **blurs our perspective; it interferes with how we see things.**

The Bible tells us that God’s ways are “**higher than ours.**” I like to think of it as God having this **elevated view** where he can see things much better than we can. He has a better **perspective.**

But because we are often stuck in the moment we are stuck where we are and can only see what’s happening in the moment, we tend to respond to God and others based on that, and how we feel in the moment.

What Jonah **didn’t** know was that at some time in the future, God would bring judgment on Assyria.

One bible scholar estimates that it was at least **100 years** before God finally decided to judge **Ninevah** because of its **wickedness** and this was through another prophet called Nahum.

But for the generation alive in Jonah’s day it was a time of mercy for the Ninevites.

So God responds to Jonah by asking him twice, in **verse 4** and **verse 9**, “**Is it right for you to be angry?**”

In this case, it was **wrong** for Jonah to be angry.

Of course there are times when it is necessary to be angry when we see **injustice** or **cruelty** and **corruption.**

That’s what the Bible calls **righteous anger.** But what we see here in Jonah is **self-righteous** or **self-centered** anger.

Jonah’s pride made him feel better than those people, and therefore they didn’t deserve God’s mercy - they deserved to die.

In verse 10 God goes on to say...

10 ...“You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. 11 But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in **spiritual darkness**, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn’t I feel sorry for such a great city?” (Jonah 4:10-11 NLT).

Now I want us to notice is how God tries to **shift** Jonah’s perspective.

God tells Jonah, these people are in **spiritual darkness** - another translation of the Bible says "**they cannot tell their right hand from their left**".

What we see here is that God **empathizes** with the Ninevites... He does not does not **excuse** their behavior - but he **explains** their behavior - **and he still expects them to change their behaviour**.

And that's how it is. When you try to understand where someone is coming from or why they are behaving the way they are you can still call them to be **accountable** for their actions - you can still call them to change - but you can do it with a heart of grace...

I read an article recently entitled "**If You're Angry, You're Part of the Problem, Not the Solution**" by **non-Christain** writer named **Ryan Holiday**.

He was saying in most cases when we face a situation *where we are dealing with people who have different views from us* - he said in most cases it doesn't help to get **angry**.

He says the reason we **get angry** or **lose our patience** with other people who we **disagree** with is because we think they are doing wrong **on purpose**. Then he says how many times have you and I have been wrong in the past and yet we were **convinced** that we were doing right?

And then he says and even when people are deliberately doing wrong and they know it's wrong - it **still** doesn't help to **lose our temper** and **get angry** with them because in order to deal with their wickedness we need to be **rational** and **strategic** - and according to him anger will only work to make you **less rational**.

The last thing I want us to consider is that anger against God must be **processed in prayer**.

I don't think there is a single commentator who I read who had anything positive to say about Jonah and his attitude.

But there is one thing I would like to credit Jonah for. And that is that throughout this whole experience - we see that Jonah is in conversation to God.

Jonah is angry - but he's talking to God. He doesn't understand - but he's talking to God. He has a bad attitude - but he's **still** talking to God.

Very often when we are angry at God and we don't understand what he is trying to do - we shut ourselves off from God and can't even talk to him in prayer.

But Jonah keeps praying. And when Jonah prays God speaks back to Jonah. For us, God speaks to us primarily through his word - the Bible.

And my experience has been that when I pray and I spend time in God's Word - God has a tendency of making me notice things in the Bible that relate directly to what I may be going through. And that's often how I can tell that God is speaking to me about a particular situation.

When I'm finding it hard to pray I also tend to spend a lot of time in the psalms where I feel like my emotions can find expression... but at the same God can speak to me.

One of my favorite psalms says:

“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me. Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my saviour and my God.” (42:11, NIV)

And so my challenge for us this morning is that even when we are angry at God we should pray. And as we pray I believe the Holy Spirit can remind us of the kind of God we serve - a God who is gracious and compassionate.

And I believe that when we have a real sense of who God is - when we have a deeper understanding of his character - our anger can be replaced with a sense of peace, even when we don't understand.

Finally I want us to think about Jesus is the perfect Jonah. The Bible tells us that while we were his enemies - he was willing to die for us. Not like Jonah who wanted his enemies dead.

And when this thought of the torture that he would endure to die for us seemed to overwhelm Jesus - he didn't respond to **God the father in anger** - he responded in **prayer** and said “Father not my will but yours will be done.”

My hope is that God's grace to us through Jesus - his compassion to us and his mercy to us - will cause us to be thankful for his provision - it will help us to see things the way he sees them - and will help us to remain in constant communication with him.

Even when we don't understand what's going on - even when it comes to loving people that we may not like. Let's pray.