

JONAH: RUNAWAY PROPHET
THE PROBLEM WITH ANGER

Wednesday, July 15

Reading: Jonah 4:4-5

Jonah 4:4 *But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"*

Jonah has exposed the prejudice and rebellion still in his heart. He has gone so far as to call God's compassion on Nineveh evil! He would prefer to die than see his enemies live. Jonah is still trying to control the situation and tell God what to do. In effect, he is saying, "Take Your pick, God. Me or the Ninevites?" What is God's response to His prophet's anger?

God had every right to be angry with Jonah. He had disobeyed and ran away from God's mission. After some chastening by God, he had half-heartedly repented and preached Nineveh's doom. But in his heart, Jonah is still in rebellion against God. But instead of giving Jonah what he deserves, God shows him mercy once again. He asks Jonah a simple question: "Is it right for you to be angry?" God wants the pouting prophet to think: Are his present actions and attitudes pleasing to God? Does what he is thinking and saying demonstrate the heart of God?

There could be only one correct answer to God's question. God had chosen to have mercy on Nineveh, so it was wrong for Jonah to be angry with God's decision. His mission completed, Jonah goes outside the city and sets up camp hoping God will change His mind and destroy Nineveh anyway. Wrong answer, Jonah!

But how often do we do the same thing! We want God to show compassion and mercy to us yet still desire to see our enemies punished. One author wrote: "You can safely assume that you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do."¹ But God does not work on our timetable or according to our selfish desires. He works out His plan and purpose, as Paul repeatedly reminds us in the opening verses of Ephesians, "to the praise of glorious grace" (1:6) and "for the praise of His glory" (1:12, 14).

Jonah was more concerned with his own reputation and his hatred for Israel's enemies. What would people think after he had preached Nineveh's destruction only for the city to be spared! Earlier, in the belly of the fish, Jonah had prayed "Salvation comes from the LORD" (2:9). But did he really understand God's salvation. Even in that prayer there are hints that Jonah thought God's salvation was only for Israel, not Gentile nations. In 2:9, Jonah had prayed, "Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. **BUT I**, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to You" (emphasis added). But when the people of Nineveh turn from their idols to God in repentance, Jonah will not accept it!

When have you seen God work in a way you didn't expect or that upset you?
How should you respond in those situations?

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. (James 1:19-21)

¹ Anne Lamott – quoted by Paul R. House & Stephen M. Coleman. The Minor Prophets: Seek the Lord and Live (Preach the Word series), 307.