

Overcoming Anger through God's Grace Jonah 4

Weatherly Heights Baptist Church
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He did what God wanted. He finally submitted to the will of God. He did the work of God and the Ninevites were converted. Jonah should have been rejoicing that God showed mercy to these people and spared them of the consequences that God had promised. But instead Jonah was angry because he didn't expect the Ninevites to convert and even though they did, he wanted them punished. He wanted God to follow through on God's promise for judgement. God offered the people something greater than judgement, God's mercy and grace. God showed us that God is a gracious and merciful God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God taught the people and is teaching us that God's mercy is even greater than justice.

In addition to refereeing soccer, I also can train referees through classroom instruction as well as through on-field assessment and evaluation. One of the areas we evaluate a referee is through their management of the game. Often, we listen for how referees verbally interact with players and coaches during a match. How an official speaks during a match can allow them to maintain or regain control or lose it. Often, I will hear referees say to a player if you do that one more time then _____ will happen. That is not necessarily a bad thing to say; however, if you don't follow through with it then you lose credibility. Sometimes as parents we say to our children, if you do this one more time then you will have _____ consequence. Other siblings of the child are quick to point out when we as parents don't follow through with our warning. Maybe it's because we chose to offer mercy to the child or sometimes as parents, we just forget what we said earlier because we have a few things going on.

Jonah had been given a message by God with a warning of the consequences for their actions. I think we can emphasize with Jonah. He probably felt that his word had no credibility. He delivered God's message but, in his eyes, God didn't follow through. If someone says they've got your back and then they leave you standing alone, it hurts, and you harbor ill feelings. There's a sermon in here about God's mercy being greater than

justice and I believe that's important to remember this morning. But there's also a sermon in the way that Jonah's anger manifests within him and towards God and how Jonah deals with it.

Jonah is so angry that he's willing to let his anger destroy him. Jonah thought he was loyal to God, despite running away at first, and he feels that God is being unfair to him by not destroying Nineveh. Have you been angry before? I mean really angry. What caused that anger? As you processed that anger, did it lead to an understanding of a deeper anger or emotion buried within you? As you can imagine, there are lots of anger issues from time to time in my home with the different kids that come through. What I have noticed is that often what makes them angry, the action or situation that provokes the anger, leads to a discussion and understanding of a deeper more painful anger that is being locked inside. They are not angry over the situation at hand. They are angry because they are in foster care or because their parents have let them down or because they have no control of whatever is going on. We all can do this. Rather than deal with the anger, we hold it in and over time our anger turns to resentment or destructive outward expressions. Our pent-up anger overflows into our relationships with others or the way we care for our children or the work in which we are called to. Sometimes our anger sends us into isolation and keeps us living in discomfort. We cannot allow our anger to keep us in discomfort and isolation. Sometimes I think we believe that it's easier to live in our anger rather than face the reality in front of us. We offer validity to our anger and the reason for it, but we don't move from it; we choose to dwell in it.

Where does your anger come from? Is it situational? Are there are series of events that have brought you to where you are? Or is it someone? Someone that has let you down or someone that has hurt you. Maybe you continue to see that person and rather than acknowledge that anger and resentment you continue to suppress it. Do you see yourself in Jonah? Would you rather hold onto your judgement and anger towards someone rather than forgive? Maybe you consider that person beyond God's grace. To move beyond our anger, we must forgive and do so with the realization that an apology may never come or our feeling of their worthiness to be forgiven may never fully be resolved. To forgive is to let go and move forward.

I knew a young man who lived in anger. His situation had brought him into foster care. He had bounced around from home to home for the past 7 years. He had seen several opportunities for adoptions fail and that had scarred him. He had a sibling that was adopted but that family did not want him. That scarred him. He bounced up and down in school with grades improving to dropping to the point of no motivation to continue. He measured his efforts based on his past mistakes and not what he was capable of. This has scarred him. The scars from the events in his short-lived life thus far were manifested through anger. He continued to live in anger. He had gotten himself to the point where his anger was becoming his destruction.

Living in anger will become our destruction if we do not deal with it. Maybe we do not realize just how angry we are and how we are holding onto something and so we need a gentle nudge to open our eyes. Anger is an emotion made for us to feel as humans, given to us from God. There is nothing wrong with experiencing anger, but how we deal with it makes all the difference. Is your anger holding you back or pushing you deeper into depression? Is the anger you experience on the surface an indicator of a deeper anger from within?

My prayer for us today is that whatever it is that we struggle with, whether it be anger, sadness, pain or whatever hurt that we may feel right now or whatever struggle or hardship that we face, that we are open to receiving the grace and mercy of Christ that is greater than anything we may experience. We will come to the table of the Lord in a few moments. Part of the preparation to receive the bread and the cup includes a prayer of confession and assurance of pardon. Maybe as you come to the table this morning there is something else you need to let go of. Maybe it is anger that you continue to cling to. Maybe it is a situation or a person that you need to let go of and trust that God will work through whatever that may be. We are all broken people and we gather together at the table this morning because we realize that our brokenness is not beyond repair nor is it too great for God to handle. This morning, you are invited and welcome at the table of the Lord.