ANGRY ENOUGH TO DIE

SERIES: GOD OF A SECOND CHANCE

DISCOVERY PAPERS

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Jonah 4
4th Message
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The book of Jonah, surprisingly, doesn't end after the first chapter. Jonah was thrown overboard, but he didn't drown, as we would have expected. Instead, he was swallowed by a fish. Oh, the fish will do him in, right? Wrong: the fish saves him. Okay, we get two more chapters. The Lord finally gets Jonah to do what he wants: preach in Nineveh. Nineveh is extraordinarily responsive. Mission accomplished. End of story. Well, not quite. Why do we have a fourth chapter? God must be interested in something more than getting us to do what he wants us to do.

Jim Elliot, a missionary who was killed by the South American natives he was trying to reach, wrote, "How well I see now that He [God] is wanting to do something in me! So many missionaries, intent on doing something, forget that His main work is to make something of them, not just to do a work by their stiff and bungling fingers."[1]

Jonah, a missionary, did something. Did he ever! A city of 120,000 repented because of his preaching. But he forgot, if in fact he ever knew in the first place, that God's main work was to make something of him: to do a work in him, not just through him. Therefore, God has more work to do, not in Nineveh but in Jonah's heart. He has more work to do in our hearts also, some of the most important work that he can do. And what is that? It's to show us his heart. God works in our hearts by showing us his heart. In the final chapter of the Jonah story, look for God's heart. He is the God of a second chance—not so much giving us a second chance to do what he wants us to do but giving us a second chance, and a lifetime of chances, to see his heart.

True to the rest of the book, the final chapter is full of surprises.

Jonah unloads

Jonah 4:1–4:

> **But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [2]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. [3]Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." [4]And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"**

What, or who, displeased Jonah? The word translated "it displeased" could equally be translated "he displeased," in which case the sentence would read, "But he displeased Jonah exceedingly . . .." If understood in this way, the one who displeases Jonah is God, who had relented from the disaster he said he would visit upon Nineveh. Or, as the ESV has it, "it" displeases Jonah—that is, God's relenting displeases him. More literally, God, or at least what God did, is a "great evil" to Jonah. Even though the people of Nineveh turned from their "evil" way, and God turned from his "anger," sparing Nineveh, Jonah is "angry" with what God has done and quite possibly with God himself (Jonah 3:8–9). The wording of verse 1 echoes Jonah 1:16, when the pagan sailors *feared the Lord exceedingly*, except that Jonah isn't fearing the Lord; he's exceedingly angry with the Lord.

For the second time in the book of Jonah, the prophet prays. The first time Jonah prayed, the narrator introduced his prayer this way: *Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God*, whereupon Jonah thanked the Lord for delivering him from the sea. Likewise, the narrator introduces Jonah's second prayer this way: *And he prayed to the Lord.* Given what has taken place in Nineveh, and given the similar introduction, we might expect another prayer of thanksgiving, but the Lord this time is not identified as Jonah's God, evidently because Jonah is anything but thankful. Back in Jonah 2, there was a hole in Jonah's prayer: he was thankful that the Lord rescued him from the sea but not thankful that the Lord rescued him from his sin, which had placed him in the sea. He went to Nineveh, but now it's clear that his heart wasn't in it. The Lord's provision of the fish could have changed his heart, but it didn't.

Instead of giving thanks, Jonah unloads. Way back in Jonah 1, when Jonah fled to Tarshish instead of fulfilling his commission and going to Nineveh, we didn't know what was bothering him. Now, the narrator, by recording

Jonah's prayer in Jonah 4:2, lets us in on the prophet's thought process. Jonah refused to fulfill his commission because of what he knew about the Lord: "for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."

What Jonah claims to know about the Lord has been confirmed in the book of Jonah so far. In Jonah 1, the Lord sent a storm but then relented when the sailors called out to him and hurled Jonah into the sea. Jonah, though he was disobedient to the Lord, experienced him to be merciful in Jonah 2. In his first prayer, after being rescued by the fish that the Lord had sent, Jonah referred to the "steadfast love" of the Lord (Jonah 2:8). In turning from his anger against Nineveh, the Lord has shown himself to be "slow to anger." But Jonah knew of all these attributes before experiencing them in the events that ensued after his disobedience. He knew about them because of what the Lord revealed to Israel, beginning in Exodus 34:6, when the Lord passed before Moses and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness . . .." Such words echoed down through the Scriptures of Israel, reappearing on multiple occasions.

When did those words first appear? After Israel passed through the Red Sea and disobeyed the Lord by worshiping the golden calf. By contrast, Jonah, a prophet of Israel, got in his disobedience first; then he passed through the sea. In passing through the sea, he experienced the mercy of the Lord. Before the Lord called him to preach in Nineveh, Jonah knew about the Lord's mercy, and he didn't like it. Moreover, since then, Jonah has personally experienced the Lord's mercy, and has benefited from it, and he still doesn't like it. In fact, he's angry enough to die. When the Lord was merciful to him and saved his life, Jonah was thankful. When the Lord is merciful to Nineveh and spares it, Jonah doesn't want to live anymore and, in fact, asks the Lord to take his life, erasing what the Lord had just accomplished by saving his life. Jonah is not so much bothered by the Lord's mercy (he was thankful when he benefited from it) but that the Lord, in his mercy, not to mention his grace, patience, and steadfast love, relents from disaster. Specifically, Jonah is angry that the Lord has relented from the disaster he all but promised, through Jonah, to visit upon Nineveh (Jonah 3:10).

Literally, Jonah says it is "good" for him to die, especially in that he believed that the Lord, or at least what the Lord did in declining to punish Nineveh, was "evil."

Mystery revealed

The book of Jonah is what I call a "character mystery." Why was Jonah, right from the start, so opposed to fulfilling his commission from the Lord and preaching in Nineveh? The answer emerges here, in the final chapter. From what we can tell, Jonah, a prophet from the northern kingdom of Israel, was a nationalist (2 Kings 14:25). Assyria, the capital of which was Nineveh, was a wicked and hated enemy, which eventually conquered the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. By all appearances, though the narrator doesn't come right out and say it, perhaps because it would be understood by his first readers, Jonah hated Nineveh and therefore wanted to see it destroyed, not spared. What Jonah feared has come upon him: his God has spared his enemy. What's worse—and this must gall him no end—his God has used him, and the message that he was compelled to deliver, to spare his enemy.

The Lord literally responds, *Do you do good to be angry?* Jonah doesn't answer, perhaps because he's made his point and concludes that further dialog is pointless, but we can imagine what he's thinking: "You bet I do good to be angry, because you were angry with my enemies, promised (through me, by the way) to visit disaster upon them, and did nothing about it."

Is God really good?

Have you ever been a victim of wrongdoing? If nothing immediately springs to mind, consider what's happened to you on the roads recently: the drivers going too fast or too slow, cutting you off or not making room for you. Have you ever wanted someone to suffer for hurting you (or for cutting you off)? Have you ever envisioned that person suffering, and have you savored that vision? My answer to all those questions is yes. If you likewise answer yes to such questions, then you too can identify somewhat with what Jonah was feeling. And what if God were to let the person who hurt you off the hook and that person suffered no ill effects for his or her actions? What if God—whom you know, sometimes regretfully, to be gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love—relented from disaster? You might be angry. You might be exceedingly angry. You might be exceedingly angry with God, and you might revise your assessment of his actions and his character. Is what he does really good? Is he really good? You might do what Jonah did: you might unload. Maybe you've already felt and done what Jonah felt and did. Maybe you're feeling and doing it even now.

In the musical *Les Miserables*, based on Victor Hugo's novel, Javert, a lawman, worries that his enemy, Jean Valjean, a fugitive, won't be punished for his sins. Standing on a bridge over the River Seine in Paris, Javert feels as if his world is falling apart:

Shall his sins be forgiven?
Shall his crimes be reprieved?
And must I now begin to doubt
Who never doubted all these years?
My heart is stone and still it trembles
The world I have known is lost in shadow.[ii]

When our sense of justice is violated, as Javert's was, our worldview, including our view of God, can take a hit. What does God do about it? What does he do with Jonah? The story takes another twist.

The Lord appoints a plant

Jonah 4:5–9:

> **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. 6Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. 7But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. 8When 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." 9But 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."**

Jonah, having entered Nineveh from the west and traveled through it, exits to the east. After the Lord rescued Israel from Egypt, finally by parting the Red Sea, the Israelites built booths for shelter in the wilderness. In fact, the Lord commanded Israel to build booths and live in them for seven days a year after they became settled in the Promised Land in order to remember the Lord (Leviticus 23:39–43). Jonah, a prophet of Israel, not only echoes Israel by being rescued from the sea, he also echoes Israel, in a backward sort of way, by building a booth after passing through the sea. Jonah is decidedly not observing the feast of the booths, and, having just had it out with the Lord, he certainly isn't building a booth to remember the Lord. He builds a booth for shade as he waits, apparently to see whether the Lord will destroy the city. But wait, didn't the Lord already relent from disaster? Well, yes, but if he was influenced by Nineveh's repentance, perhaps he will be influenced by Jonah's anger.

Jonah not only echoes Israel, he also echoes the king of Nineveh—again, in a backward sort of way. The repentant king suffered by covering himself in sackcloth, he sat in ashes, and he waited to see if God would turn from his anger. Jonah, on the other hand, guarded against suffering by building a booth, sat not in ashes but in the shade, and waited to see if God would rekindle his anger. Does Jonah need to repent, just like the pagan king needed to repent?

The Lord doesn't rekindle his anger; he is unmoved by Jonah's anger. Instead, he appoints a plant to "save" Jonah from his discomfort, just as he appointed the fish to save him (Jonah 1:17). After all, as Jonah himself noted, after the Lord sent the fish for him, *Salvation belongs to the Lord* (Jonah 2:9). Jonah hoped for the judgment of Nineveh; instead, he experiences the salvation of Jonah. But hadn't Jonah already provided for himself by building the booth? The booth must have been inadequate, for Jonah was still in "discomfort." Jonah needs saving—again.

In fact, Jonah needs saving in more ways than one, for the word translated "discomfort" is more often translated "evil." In fact, it was used in connection with the people of Nineveh, whose "evil" came up before the Lord (Jonah 1:2). The word was also used, in verbal form, by Jonah himself, who deemed what God had done, or possibly even God himself, a *great evil* (Jonah 4:1). If Jonah thinks this way, then he needs to be saved not so much from his discomfort but from his "evil." The Lord saved the people of Nineveh from their evil (through Jonah's preaching, as a matter of fact), and the Lord saved Jonah from the sea. Now the Lord sets out to save Jonah from himself, from the evil that is in him, the evil that believes that the Lord, or at least what the Lord does, is evil.

Jonah, resting under the shade of the plant, is *exceedingly glad*. Ah, we've seen this construction before. The sailors, rightly, feared the Lord exceedingly (Jonah 1:16). Jonah, wrongly, was exceedingly displeased with God (Jonah 4:1). Now Jonah is *exceedingly glad* about the plant. Shouldn't he have been exceedingly glad, instead of being exceedingly displeased, when the Lord spared Nineveh? Yes, he should have been glad—exceedingly glad.

The need to be saved

Do we, like Jonah, need to be saved? Certainly, if we have come to faith in Jesus Christ, we've been saved in the eternal sense, but we also need to be saved in a day-to-day sense—saved from our false beliefs. Mostly, we need to be saved from our false beliefs about God. To be honest, I don't like everything God does. Especially, I don't like what he doesn't do. He doesn't do very much, or at least he doesn't seem to do very much, about the evil in the world, just as he didn't do very much about the evil in Nineveh. We may not call God "evil," but if he can do something about evil in the world and doesn't do anything about it, what do you call that? And if he can do something about the evil that is done to us or to those we love and he doesn't do anything about it, what do you call that? Life hurts. Doubts creep in. Beliefs form—beliefs about God at variance from biblical beliefs, beliefs from which we need to be saved. Anger often reveals beliefs—sometimes false beliefs—about God. Certainly, we need to name our anger and express it to God, as Jonah does, as the psalmist did, but we need to do so in order to be saved from any false beliefs behind it.

British writer Kingsley Amis, when asked whether he believed in God, answered, "No, and I hate him." Because of the evil in the world, Amis wrote blistering attacks against the God in whom he didn't believe.

Do we need to be saved from our false beliefs that God is, if not evil then less than good? If so, how might God save us?

Angry enough to die

Can Jonah change? He doesn't seem capable of changing on his own. Therefore, God helps him, first by appointing a worm to destroy the plant and second by appointing a scorching wind. Both "appointments" allow for the sun to literally "attack" Jonah, just as the worm "attacked" the plant. As a result, Jonah becomes faint. Earlier, when Jonah's life was *fainting away* in the sea, he remembered the Lord and prayed to him (Jonah 2:7). His prayer in Jonah 2 was for deliverance. Do we get a prayer from Jonah this time as he becomes faint? Indeed we do, but it is not a prayer for deliverance. On the contrary, it is a prayer for anti-deliverance: *And he asked that he might die.* Jonah repeats, word for word, his earlier contention: *It is better for me to die than to live.* Again, the word translated "better" would literally be translated "good." Jonah's concept of good and evil hasn't changed. The prayer we might hope for from Jonah at this point would be a prayer of contrition, or at least humility, the kind we got from the pagan sailors in Jonah 1:14, the kind the pagan king urged upon his people in Jonah 3:8. The king got off his throne to repent, but Jonah can't get off his high horse.

Will God answer Jonah's prayer and put him to death? Or will he finally at least leave Jonah alone? That's what Jonah wants: he wants God to leave him alone. In life, God has been exceedingly uncooperative. For Jonah, the only escape from God is death. Jonah's twice-repeated assertion that it is better to die than to live would seem to be final.

God, however, won't give up. First, he asked Jonah to go to Nineveh. When Jonah refused, God sent a wind and a fish. When the fish spit Jonah up on the shore, God again asked Jonah to go to Nineveh. After Jonah pitched a fit when God spared Nineveh, God literally asked Jonah, *Do you do good to be angry?* After God sends a plant and another wind, he again asks Jonah whether he does "good" to be angry, only this time he asks whether he does good to be angry "for the plant." The Lord is the God of a second chance, even when we don't want a second chance.

Any change in Jonah? No. He deems himself literally "good" to be angry, and for the third time he wishes for death. How angry is he? *Angry enough to die*. Jonah's heels are dug in: he's good, and God, or at least what God has done, both with Nineveh and with Jonah, is evil.

Exacerbating the problem

Our false beliefs about God, which form because of the evil in the world and, especially, because of the evil done to us and those we love, are sometimes so deeply held that we aren't even aware of them. Sometimes, our anger makes us aware. Once we become aware of our false beliefs, we can't usually repent of them on our own because they are so deeply held. We need help: God's help. We cannot save ourselves. Therefore, God helps us.

Sometimes, he helps us the way he helped Jonah. To our delight, he protects us from discomfort, making up for our shabby efforts to protect ourselves. Then, to our dismay, he removes his protection, exposing us to scorching harshness, pain, and suffering, making us faint, so to speak. Why would he protect us only to withdraw his protection? Because he's not nearly as concerned for our comfort as we are. He's far more concerned for our faith, for renewing our hearts and minds so that our beliefs about him increasingly match his reality.

Such help may not be the kind we had in mind. If we had a problem with God before he started "helping" us

by exposing us to suffering, his help, far from solving our problem, may in fact exacerbate it. Certainly, God's help exacerbated Jonah's problem with God. God's so-called help may make us more angry with him, not less. We may want, in the manner of Jonah, for God simply to leave us alone. Some people are so angry that they think God out of existence, people such as Kingsley Amis, who didn't believe in God but hated him nonetheless. Others are angry enough to die: they would rather die—literally—than live in a world where God allows evil and (apparently) doesn't punish evil. They take matters into their own hands and end their lives.

In *Les Miserables*, Javert tries to come to terms with the world of his enemy, "the world of Jean Valjean," where mercy prevails over his version of justice, but he cannot do it:

I am reaching, but I fall
And the stars are black and cold.
As I stare into the void
Of a world that cannot hold
I'll escape now from the world
From the world of Jean Valjean
There is nowhere I can turn
There is no way to go on … [iii]

Javert then throws himself off the bridge and into the River Seine.

What will come of Jonah, who's angry enough to die? What will come of us? Can suffering actually help us?

Mercy for Nineveh

Jonah 4:10–11:

> **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. [11]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?"**

So angry is Jonah that the object lesson is lost on him, so God has to spell things out for him. Jonah's "pity" for the plant was, of course, pity for himself. He was glad for what the plant did for him, and he was angry when it was taken away. Jonah and the rest of Israel, as the people of God, have his plant, so to speak: his word. God is saying to Jonah, now that the plant has been taken away, "In a small sort of way, feel what it's like to be Nineveh, to be without my word and to be teetering on the edge of oblivion. Walk a mile in the shoes of Nineveh, Jonah." Jonah, and the rest of Israel, for that matter, didn't do anything to deserve God's protection: Jonah neither labored for it nor made it grow. God made Israel his people because of all the attributes that Jonah cited: his grace, his mercy, his patience, and his steadfast love.

In fact, God made Israel his people so that the nations might know his grace, his mercy, his patience, and his steadfast love through Israel. The Lord partnered with Abraham, the patriarch of Israel, so that Abraham might be "a blessing," so that *all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (Genesis 12:1–3). He said to Israel, *I will make you as a light for the nations, / that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth* (Isaiah 49:6). Therefore, God says to Jonah, "Now that you know, in a small way, what it's like to be Nineveh, apart from the protection of my word (without the plant), should I also not pity Nineveh, inasmuch as I have 'pitied' you and your nation? Should I not turn from my anger?"

Nineveh is a "great" city—literally a *great city to God* (Jonah 3:3). It is meaningful to him. He wishes not for it to perish. As it turns out, that's why he sent Jonah in the first place, to preach "against" it and to preach "to" it, threatening that it could be *overthrown* in the hopes that it would *turn around* (Jonah 1:2; 3:2, 3:4). It has more than 120,000 persons who, lacking God's word, *do not know their right hand from their left*, who cannot distinguish between good and evil. Or, should we say, Nineveh had 120,000 persons who couldn't distinguish between good and evil until a prophet of Israel showed up with a word from the Lord.

Why are the cattle part of God's concern? Cattle support humans; they're important to the economy. God is concerned for Nineveh in a comprehensive way, for it as a civilization. Moreover, it should not be lost on us that the king of Nineveh took Jonah's word so seriously that he even ordered the animals of Nineveh to "repent" by wearing sackcloth (Jonah 3:8). The pagan sailors repent. The pagans of Nineveh repent. The pagan king of Nineveh repents. Even the pagan animals of Nineveh repent. Can the prophet of Israel repent?

Can he? Does he? We don't know, do we? The story ends. Well, surely the story doesn't end, but we don't know how it ends. Why would the narrator end without an ending? Because he wants his readers, the men and women of Israel, to see themselves in their prophet and to imagine how they want the story to end. The last word belongs to God, not his petulant prophet, and his last

word constitutes an appeal—to Jonah, to the first readers of the story, and to us. You're Jonah. How do you want your story to end?[4]

Mercy for all

We enjoy God's mercy when he extends it to us, even if we don't really know that we're experiencing it. We don't tend to enjoy his mercy so much when he extends it to so-called "evil" men and women, especially those who have wronged us. Really, if we appreciate God's mercy at all, we're only beginning to appreciate it. Consider the mercy he has shown us in giving us his word. Without it, we would not know our right hand from our left, good from evil. We neither labored for his word nor made it grow, so to speak: we did nothing to deserve it. If we have done nothing to deserve God's mercy but have benefited from it nonetheless, should not God also extend his mercy to others who likewise don't deserve it and may, in fact, have proved that they don't deserve it by wronging us or those we love?

Jonah didn't think so and had to learn it the hard way (though by the end of the book, he still hadn't learned it). By causing the plant to grow, the Lord demonstrated what he, in his mercy, had done for Jonah and his people: making them his people and giving them his word. When the Lord took away the plant, Jonah was supposed to see, in a small way, the suffering that he and his people would have been exposed to apart from the Lord's mercy. Now that you're experiencing a little suffering, Jonah, don't you want to be spared from it? Shouldn't you want other undeserving people, like yourself, to be spared from such suffering also? Suffering can teach us such a lesson.

When we suffer, we don't want to suffer; and we don't want anyone else to suffer like we're suffering—even, perhaps, those who have wronged either us or those we love. Some people who have suffered in particular ways have been motivated to start organizations to protect others from suffering similar fates. Mothers Against Drunk Driving, for example, was founded by a mother whose daughter was killed by a drunken driver. Suffering teaches us empathy and, if it's the Jonah kind of suffering, empathy for those who have done us wrong. In God's "severe mercy," he helps us appreciate his mercy.[5] Jonah-like suffering can help us renew our hearts and minds so that we increasingly value the universal mercy of God. Or, like Jonah, are we blinded by our anger? Suffering can open a heart, but it can also close a heart. The Lord is merciful to all, even those who have wronged us, holding back his judgment, wanting them to turn from their ways and turn to him.

I heard Oswald Sanders, who was director of Overseas Missionary Fellowship and the author of more than forty books on the spiritual life, speak in his late eighties, just before he died. He said that when he was a young preacher, he overheard a conversation between two women after the worship service at which he preached. Sanders said, "And they were talking about a very interesting subject: they were talking about me!" In the wake of his sermon, one woman said to the other, "He'll be all right after he suffers a bit." Sanders went on to tell us that the woman was absolutely right: he needed to suffer, and suffer he did. Maybe we need to suffer a bit in order to see God's heart. Suffering teaches us, or can teach us, mercy.

East of the city

God is interested in way more than getting us to do what he wants us to do. If that's all he were interested in, the book of Jonah would end after the third chapter. What's God interested in? He's interested in our hearts. He wants to work in our hearts. How does he do it? He works in our hearts by showing us his heart and, in so doing, transforms us (2 Corinthians 3:18). What do we see in the book of Jonah? We see mercy. We see God's mercy for all. We see God's mercy for the men and women of Nineveh, whose evil had come up to God, and for the most evil men and women who inhabit our world, and, not least, for those who have done damage, even great damage, to us or those we love. Sometimes, in God's severe mercy, he shows us his mercy by allowing us to suffer, so that we will want for others not to suffer, even those who have wronged us or those we love.

Jonah is angry—angry enough to die. Well, God is angry too, because of all the evil in the world, because men and women have turned their backs on him and are therefore destroying each other and destroying themselves. Of all that God has created, only humanity is said to be made in his image. When we have children, they are, in a sense, made in our image: they look somewhat like us and even take on some of our mannerisms. When you look into your child's face, you see your image, so to speak. If someone destroyed your child, or if your child destroyed herself, how would you feel? Angry? God is angry—angry enough to die. But he can't die. Jonah can die and Javert can die, but God can't die. God is angry—angry enough to die. But he's also slow to anger, withholding judgment, giving men and women time and space to turn from their ways and turn to him. He's angry and he's merciful. So what does he do?

In Jonah's time, it was not yet thought that God existed in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was not

thought that God could become a human. Who could have thought it? Well, God could have thought it. He did think it. In fact, he became it—human, that is. The Son of God, who was God, became flesh.

Near the end of his time on earth, the Son of God, like Jonah, looked over a city from the east—in his case, the city of Jerusalem, which was crawling with enemies who were plotting his death. In contrast to Jonah, who hoped for the destruction of Nineveh, Jesus knew that Jerusalem would be destroyed (Matthew 24:1–2). Instead of rejoicing at the prospect, Jesus wept for his enemies (Luke 19:41). East of the city, Jesus lamented, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!* (Matthew 23:37)

What does the Son of God do? He suffers. He dies. He suffers and dies at the hands of his enemies—for his enemies. He also suffers and dies for us. Listen to the apostle Paul:

> **For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Romans 5:8–10)**

God is angry enough to die, but he can't die. Therefore, he sends a wind. He sends a fish. He sends a plant. He sends a worm. He sends another wind. Finally, he sends his Son—to die, and his Son dies willingly, satisfying God's anger and multiplying his mercy, in anticipation of the final day of judgment, when God rights all wrongs, turns evil into good, and restores all things. Do you realize that God will turn—indeed, is already turning—into good every evil thing that has ever happened to you and every evil thing that has ever happened to those you love? If you doubt, look at the cross. Has not God turned the most evil thing that has ever happened, the crucifixion of his holy and beloved Son, into the best thing that has ever happened?

Are you angry at someone who has wronged you, angry at God for letting him off the hook? As God asked Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" Well, yeah, maybe. But what does God want to do? He wants to show you his heart. From the book of Jonah, and from the Son of God, can you see it? Can you see God's heart? Can you see his mercy—for you, for everyone, for those who have hurt you or those you love?

How do you want your story to end? Sitting in judgment outside the city, so to speak, heels dug in, having it out with God, clinging to grudges? Or, can you see God's heart?

(Endnotes)

[i] Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1979), 179.

[ii] Herbert Kretzmer, "Javert's Soliloquy," *Les Miserables* (The David Geffen Co., 1987).
N.T. Wright, "God in the Dock: What Place Now for Christian Faith in Public Life" (Dublin: C.S. Lewis Lecture, 2011).

[iii] Kretzmer.

[iv] The book of Jonah has much in common with the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32. The Ninevites are like the younger son who repents, and Jonah is like the older son who also needs to repent but whose destiny remains unknown at the end of the story. The Pharisees and scribes are supposed to see themselves in the older son and accept Jesus' invitation to repent. Likewise, the people of Israel, the first readers of the book of Jonah, are supposed to see themselves in Jonah and repent.

[v] The words "severe mercy" were used by C.S. Lewis in a letter to his friend, Sheldon Vanauken, who went on to write a book with those words as its title.