

Some of you may know that I am the father of three children—my oldest son, Adam, is 10, my daughter, Sarah, is 7 and my youngest son, Isaiah, is 3. I don't know about your family, but there are times in our family when we don't all get along perfectly. Last weekend, we were all together in our van, on our way to a department store. My 7 year old daughter, Sarah, was sitting next to her 3 year old brother, Isaiah, and she was trying to draw a picture. Well, all of a sudden, I heard a voice from the back seat, "Daddy! Isaiah just stole my pencil!" I looked back, and sure enough, Isaiah had grabbed the pencil from Sarah's hand. I demanded that he give it back. After some resistance, he finally did.

Well, we continued on for a little while, and again, I heard Sarah's voice, "Daddy! He took it again!" I looked back, and sure enough, Isaiah had taken the pencil out of her hand *again*. "I told you before, Isaiah—DO NOT TAKE HER PENCIL!" I said. I gave him a very firm look. Finally, he gave it back. But, guess what... Just about three minutes later, I heard Sarah's voice again, "Daddy!!!! Isaiah took it again!" Now, I was mad...

How would you feel? Have you ever been in this kind of situation?

I love my kids. I want them to become good people, not bad people. I want them to respect one another. I want them to care for one another. Because of this, I can't ignore them when they are doing injustice to one another. I cannot remain passive or detached. I *do* become angry. My love for them, in fact, *moves* me to become angry with them when they hurt one another.

The Bible passage we read today was about the anger of God. We often hear about the love of God in chapel services, in churches or in Christianity classes. And it's true that the God Christians believe in is a Loving Spirit—in fact, the apostle John says that "God is love." But what does that mean?

In the Bible, God is often called our "Heavenly Father." Sometimes, especially in poetic parts of the Bible, God is portrayed as a nurturing mother. Today I encourage you to think about *how* mothers and fathers love their children. Parents love their children all the time. But when their children do hurtful things, over and over again, sometimes parents become *angry* with their children *while* they're loving them.

God is no different. Because God loves his children, God is sometimes angry with his children. In the words we read today from the prophet Micah, God becomes angry. In this passage, Micah addresses the corrupt leaders who were ruling Israel around 650 B.C. At this time in Israel's history, many things were wrong. Rich landowners had taken up residence in the cities, leaving the people in the countryside to work as poor, indentured servants on their huge estates.

This situation directly violated one of Moses' laws which required redistribution of Israel's land every 49 years—this law was called the “law of Jubilee.” Rulers ignored these laws because the rich were bribing them to do so. The priests and the so-called “prophets” in the big cities, especially in Jerusalem—the people who were supposed to be assuring that these God-given laws were obeyed—had been lulled into complacency. The entire religious system had turned into what Karl Marx called, “the opiate of the people.” It had some nostalgic and psychological value, but served no practical good. It had become a set of dead rituals without any connection to the real world.

Into this corrupt situation stepped Micah. He was a country prophet, not one of the rich and powerful city elite. And he told the truth—he told people that God was *angry*. He told people that God is angry when his children suffer. God is *angry* when some of his children work in squalid villages from dawn till dusk only to provide a life of luxury for rich men sitting in shaded rooms in far-away cities. God is *angry* when religion becomes a set of dead rituals. God is *angry* when his priests and his so-called “prophets” turn into defenders of the social status quo. God is *angry* when some of his children have far more than they need, while others have barely enough to survive. God is angry because God is a loving parent.

Look once more at the end of today's Bible passage and think about what the people of Jerusalem say, “Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us!” But what does Micah say?

God became *angry*. Just as I became angry with my own son when tried to take his sister's pencil over and over again, God becomes angry with his children when his children go on hurting and exploiting one another. *Punishment* is the inevitable result. This is not because God doesn't love us—but rather precisely because God *does* love us.

Think about our world—think about *your* world. We are all one human family, and yet somehow, even after thousands and thousands of years living together, we have not figured out how to live justly, without exploiting one another. Some of us in this world are “haves;” some are “have nots.” We live in a world of extreme wealth and extreme poverty, and this strange world has all become too natural to us. Maybe we even think, “Surely the Lord is with us! Surely no harm shall come upon us!” But maybe we're wrong. It is good every once in a while to step back from our “normal lives” and to ask ourselves some simple questions. Could God be angry at us? What will happen to a world God is angry with? How does our loving parent require we treat our brothers and sisters?

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

You have provided for all the needs of our family—
truly we have a rich and beautiful world.

And yet there is terrible injustice in our world today.

This is not your fault—it is our own.

If in our hearts there is any willingness to exploit others for our own profit, heal us.

If there be any greed in us, take it away.

If our hearts have been become hardened by apathy, let us hear your word of judgement afresh today.

And as chastened children, help us to renew our relationship with you.

In the name of the Lord Jesus, your perfect Son, we pray,

Amen.