

The Grace That Transforms

Jonah 2:10-4:1

As Jonah is vomited onto a beach, he faces two more tests – how will he react when he’s called to go to Nineveh again, and how will he respond if his worst fears come true?

A Second Chance: When God calls Jonah again he is giving him a second chance. And this time he goes. But why? Is he afraid of the consequences if he doesn’t go – as we might weigh up the consequences of our actions? Possibly, but more likely Jonah has experienced grace. He knows God has saved him and so he can go out of gratitude. When we understand God’s grace to us in Jesus, it can result on profound, life changing power.

But as Jonah goes to Nineveh you wonder, how different is he really, and how different is he from the Ninevites themselves?

Poles Apart?: On the face of it Jonah and the Ninevites are poles apart. But scratch below the surface and you realize they aren’t that different at all. The Ninevites were violent because they worshipped violent idols. But Jonah responds to God’s grace with deep anger. He is being shaped by his idols just as much as the Ninevites were. And we are not so different: we get angry when what matters most to us gets threatened.

Jonah’s anger finds its source in religion. When religion is not mixed with a humbling sense of our unworthiness and of God’s grace, it can result in just that same judgementalism that Jonah demonstrates.

So the Ninevites, Jonah, ourselves, are all in trouble and all in need of help.

The Message that Transforms: Jonah preaches a 9 word sermon – the gist of which is that Nineveh will be overthrown; but that word can also mean *turned-around*. Jonah wants them overturned, but God wants them turned around. As a result, the whole city repents. Even the king joins in.

But the king knows that outward shows of religion are not enough. They must throw themselves on God’s mercy. Their only hope is that God is a God of grace, as well as a God of justice. They discover that He is.

But where is the justice in this? How can God be both gracious to the undeserving and a God of justice – because we need Him to be both.

And the answer is: in the death of His Own Son. At the cross, God’s justice is satisfied – and we get to experience God’s grace. Jesus is overthrown in our place – he is over turned, that we might be turned around. When that sinks in it can have a profound effect upon us. When we know we are loved beyond measure, we can find our security there, rather than in other things. When we know we are debtors to grace, we can show grace to others who don’t deserve it.

And when we see the Ninevites repenting, it should give us hope: for ourselves, for our city, for those we know. If they can find grace, anyone can.