

## **God, Grace and the City**

### **Jonah 3:10-4:11**

If only Jonah had ended at the end of chapter 3 – it would have been such a good ending! Instead Jonah gets angry and prays perhaps the most extraordinary prayer of the Bible. Yet it's through that that we get to the whole point of this little book: That God is a God of grace for individuals and for cities, but religious people (like us) often stand in the way of that grace.

#### **A god in our own image**

The very qualities that Jonah appreciated about God in his own life, he now sees as major character flaws when they are applied to his enemies. Instead Jonah wants God to be like him. He wants God in his own image, and to some extent we all do.

Jonah doesn't want God to be so liberal with His grace. He wants the conservative God, who's threatens judgment and executes it. And yet, when God does exercise his right to destroy (the plant), Jonah doesn't like that either. Jonah objects to God's right to deliver. But he also objects to God's right to destroy. Jonah wants to be the boss. His faith is all about him – with him at the centre.

But this matters at a deeper level than superficial theological correctness. Jonah's emotional instability can be explained because his foundations are being shaken. He has built on an insecure foundation. When we build our lives on a god of our own imagining, the result is always going to be inner, emotional instability. When we build it on the foundation of His character, then we will know the emotional stability that can weather the instabilities of life.

#### **A God of Grace**

God handles Jonah with remarkable tenderness. First God relieves Jonah's discomfort, then He gets to the root of his discomfort. Through the saga with the plant, God wants Jonah to see how his religion plays out when he's on the receiving end of it. He wants him to see that He is both a God who overturns and a God of grace. Jonah only wants grace when it comes to him – not when it comes to his enemies.

We are not so different from Jonah. We all find forgiveness difficult. But when we realize the depth of God's grace and forgiveness to us in Christ, we will find the grace to forgive others.

#### **A God who loves the city**

Religious people tend not to love cities, but God does. He wants the city to turn and be saved. He wants Jonah, and us, to see that whilst Jonah cares for the plant, God cares for the people; whilst we care for our comfort, God cares for the city. They are like people stumbling in the dark and they need someone to show them the way. God also says he cares for the cattle – the economy of the day. God wants to redeem business and use it for His glory.

And the book ends with God drawing a distinction between Himself and Jonah. Jonah doesn't love the city – but God does. Jesus came to die for the city. He wept over Jerusalem and was crucified outside its walls. And it's in His death that we find the grace that can transform cities.