

Speaking to the soul



Grace

When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened... This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. Jonah 3:10; 4:1

So far as Jonah was concerned it was bad enough to have to go to Nineveh at all, with its terrible reputation for sin. But

at least he was given the responsibility for sharing a message of God's judgement upon them. They certainly deserved it. But to his great surprise the people repented and so God changed his mind about destroying the people. This was all too much for Jonah who became extremely angry with God. These evil people needed, in Jonah's view, to be blasted off the planet rather than offered forgiveness. Jonah reflected that he ought to have remembered that God was "a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love" (Jonah 4:2).

Jonah's reaction helps us to reflect upon the mystery of God's grace, which we meet in a very powerful way as Jesus hung on the cross. To the thief who hung beside him he said: "today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). No doubt most people who looked at the thief considered that what was happening was entirely just. Indeed, he himself recognised that he deserved to die for his crimes. But, in the closing moments of his earthly life, he was offered the gift of forgiveness. Justice determined that he deserved his punishment, but grace spoke another language. And that's precisely what Jonah struggled with. Given the famed sinfulness of Nineveh, he was looking for God to do the 'right' thing and condemn them. Instead, God reached out to them with compassion and love, and freely gave them his forgiveness.

As you go about your day, I encourage you to look at people with God's eyes of grace. Whoever you meet, you can be sure that they have all fallen short of God's glory. They are sinners, just like you and me. But God looks at all of us with grace and longs to set us free.

QUESTION

How do you cope with God forgiving people who have lived evil lives?

PRAYER

Lord God, I thank you for your amazing grace, which is able to save a wretch like me. Amen

Photograph - St David's Cathedral, Wales