

Grace: A Power to Change

Nelson Mandela was a political leader and philanthropist who served as president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999. He was the country's first black head of state and the first elected in a fully representative democratic election.

Mandela was born in a tiny village of cows, corn and mud huts in Transkei, a region where black Africans were forced to live apart from white Africans.

As a young man, he gravitated toward violent groups that challenged the laws of apartheid. The white South African judicial system sentenced him to life in prison. For many of his nearly three decades in prison, he labored under a hot African sun using a hammer to make big rocks into little rocks.

Indignity upon indignity was heaped upon him, including being denied permission to attend the funerals of his mother and his eldest son.

Amid growing domestic and international pressure, and with fears of a racial civil war, President F.W. de Klerk released him in 1990. Mandela and de Klerk led efforts to negotiate an end to apartheid, which resulted in the 1994 multiracial general election in which Mandela became president.

Think about it. When Mandela was released from prison, he had reason to be angry and bitter about the way white South Africans had treated him. He had reason to say the time of white dominance was over; now it was time for black dominance.

That did not happen. Instead of leading a bloody race war by calling for revenge of all past injustices, Mandela called for compromise, forgiveness, and reconciliation in a nation where all races are represented.

How does that happen? It is one of those mysteries of God's grace. It is a fulfillment of the promise that a person can be transformed by the renewal of the mind. It is an incomplete glimpse into how the world will look when the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven.

In our nation today, divided by political persuasions and oft-repeated cries of racism, we would do well to seek the grace of God and its transformative power. The Bible instructs us:

- *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Peter 4:10 ESV).*
- *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16 ESV).*

– Beecher Hunter