

This God Is Our God Forever & Forever

By Denis Lyle

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Lurgan Baptist Church
Johnston's Row, High Street,
Lurgan, Co Armagh
Northern Ireland, UK

Website: www.lurganbaptist.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/lurganbaptist

We're reading in Nahum 1 and as we do that, let me just on this first Sunday of the new year encourage you to be faithful and to be present at the meetings. It's good to see so many with us this morning, be with us again tonight if you can be, and through the week. We're encouraged by your presence and we miss you when your seat is vacant.

I want to bring to you, this morning, what I trust will be a word of encouragement. I want to talk to you on the subject "This God Is Our God Forever & Ever," and I want to talk to you about that subject from Nahum 1. Nahum 1:1, please. Nahum 1:1.

1 The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.
2 God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.

I wonder is that your concept of God.

3 The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. 4 He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. 5 The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. 6 Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. 7 The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.

Keep your Bible open there at Nahum 1.

A schoolteacher for young children told everyone to draw a picture of what was very important to them. In the back of the classroom, little Johnny began to labor over his drawing. Everybody had finished and had handed in their picture but he didn't. He was still drawing. The teacher walked graciously to the back of the classroom and she put her

arm around Johnny's shoulder and she said, "Johnny, what are you drawing?" He didn't look up. He just kept on working feverishly at his picture. He said, "God." "But, Johnny," the teacher said, "no one knows what God looks like." Johnny answered, "They will when I'm through."

I wonder this morning what is your concept of God. How do you view God? How do you see God? I want to talk to you, this morning, on the subject this God is our God forever and forever, and to do that I want to take you back to this little prophecy of Nahum. How many of you have ever heard a message from the book of Nahum? Hands up. At least one or two. Some of you have heard a message from the book of Nahum.

Queen Victoria was celebrating 60 years on the British throne when Rudyard Kipling published his poem entitled "Recessional." Not everyone in Great Britain liked it because it was a poem that punctured national pride at a time when the Empire was at its peak. "Recessional" was a warning that other nations had vanished from the stage of history and that Great Britain might follow in their train. God was still the judge of the nations and Kipling wrong these words,

"Far-called, our navies melt away;
On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!"

The prophet Nahum would have loved that poem, especially Kipling's reference to Nineveh, for it was Nahum who wrote this Old Testament book that vividly describes the destruction of Nineveh, the event that marked the beginning of the end of the Assyrian Empire. You remember that 150 years before that event, the prophet Jonah marched through the capital city of Assyria, which was Nineveh. You remember his message of judgment. Jonah the prophet marched through the city of Nineveh and he cried, "Forty days and yet Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Remarkably, the city repented. There was great revival in the city of Nineveh but, my dear friends, that revival was short-lived, it was transitory as many revivals are. God was patient with Nineveh, verse 3, but the day of grace has now ended and the moment of doom has come.

The word "Nahum" means "comfort" or "compassion." His message of Assyria's doom would certainly have brought comfort to the people of Judah who had suffered greatly because of the nation of Assyria. You see, Assyria was one of the world's great superpowers. Here was a godless nation that walked across the pages of human history with its big armies, its ruthless rulers, and its bully-boy tactics. Assyria has been described as the most brutal Empire that ever rolled its forces across the world. You remember that it was the Assyrians that had taken the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and had transported its inhabitants to Assyria. You remember that it was the Assyrian nation that had surrounded the city of Jerusalem many years later, and you remember they were planning to take the city, and you remember that godly King Hezekiah sent to

Isaiah the prophet, and do you recall that in one night, one angel was sent by the Lord and 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were killed. Assyria was always looming over the tiny kingdom of Judah, and having these ruthless people out of the way would have helped Judah's situation greatly.

Nahum saw it all. He saw the climactic, chaotic, catastrophic collapse of the cruelest Empire of antiquity. He saw it all and he wrote it down before any of it happened. He raised his voice. It was a voice of justice. It was a voice of judgment. It was a voice of jubilation. He recorded his vision, his vision of the patience of God, his vision of the punishment of God, his vision of the power of God, his vision of the person of God. Like a bright sparkling jewel against a black cloth of judgment, Nahum declares in verse 7, "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

I want you to take that text, this morning, with you, and into this new year. Look at the statement. I want you to see that in this text we see God personally. We see God personally. Look at it in verse 7, Nahum proclaims, "The LORD is." The Holy Spirit deemed certain truths to be self-evident. The first and foremost is that God is. I wonder this morning, do you believe in the existence of God? Do you believe in the reality of God? Here is one of the things that separates the Christian from the humanist and the agnostic: the humanist tells us that there is no God, the agnostic shrugs his shoulders and says, "Well, I just don't know," but the Christian believer comes before God and he says, "I know that God exists. The LORD is."

It's interesting that this opening chapter of Nahum's prophecy is a chapter all on theology, a study of God. It's a far different picture than the average person in our country has of God today. Do you want to see the God of the Bible? Look at these opening verses for a moment or two. Here we see the jealousy of God, verse 2 and 3, "God is jealous." Remember there is a sinful jealousy and there is a rightful jealousy. Here is God's demand for the exclusive worship of his people. Here in this chapter we see the majesty of God, verse 4. We see God's power in nature and in creation. In verses 8 to 14, we see the equity of God. The Assyrians tried to use their wisdom against him and against his people. What folly. In verses 12 and 13, we see the sovereignty of God as Nahum recognizes that God uses the Assyrians to discipline his people. In verse 15, we see the mercy of God. Here's the picture of the herald who's announcing that Nineveh is fallen, the Assyrian army is defeated. But it's not so much, this morning, the jealousy of God or the majesty of God, or the equity of God, or the sovereignty of God, or the mercy of God that we want to think about. It's in verse 7, it's the reliability of God. "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

You see, my dear friends, the Lord is essentially good. You remember that rich young ruler who came to the Lord Jesus and said, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" And Jesus says unto him, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God." Here is something about God that we need to know: God is good. The word that the Lord Jesus uses here refers to what is excellent in character and what is beneficial in effect. The Old Testament word means "pleasant; agreeable;

valuable; benevolent and kind." The word "good" is used 500 times in the Bible, and in the Psalms its reference to God is about 120 times. Listen to the words of the psalmist, "Good and upright is the LORD. O taste and see that the LORD is good. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." The Puritan pastor, Thomas Manton, put it like this, "God is originally good, good of himself, which nothing else is. He is essentially good; not only good but goodness itself. He is infinitely good. He is eternally, he is immutably good. He cannot be less than good than he is; as there can be no addition made to God, so no subtraction from God."

The original Saxon meaning of our English word "God" is "the good." He is everything that he should be. God is the sum total of all perfection. A little boy knelt down one night at his bed and he was praying, "Lord, help me to be a good boy, but you be a good God too." But my friends, there is no need to remind God to be good for he cannot possibly be anything else. The Lord is essentially good. May I suggest to you this morning, that the Lord is eternally good. What a word to hear on the first Sunday of a new year, "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

The very nations of the Mediterranean world trembled at the word "Assyria." The long story of Assyrian conflict and carnage and cruelty was well-known. How much longer was God, the God of heaven, the God of Israel, going to put up with the accursed Assyrian, that was the burning question and God gave Nahum the answer. It's significant for us to notice that when Nahum said, "The LORD is good," he was in the midst of prophesying judgment. So often we say the Lord is good when good things happen to us. It's so easy for us to say, "Isn't God good?" And then when trouble or trial or tribulation crosses our pathway, somehow or another we doubt the goodness of God. My dear friends, God is eternally good. God is immutably good. God is unchangeably good.

I was reading about Corrie ten Boom in these last few weeks, in a German concentration camp, seeing her sister Betsy starve to death before her very eyes, and she became disillusioned and everywhere around her was dark and she was beginning to doubt the goodness of God. And she said to her sister Betsy one day, she said, "Betsy, God has forgotten us." "No," said Betsy, "the Lord has not forgotten us. Remember his word, 'For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy, so great is his steadfast love toward them that fear him.'"

I just wonder this morning, has some dire circumstance caused you to doubt the goodness of God. One of God's faithful missionaries, Allen Gardiner, experienced many difficulties and hardships during his service for the Savior. Despite his troubles he said, "When God gives me strength, failure will never daunt me." In 1851 at the age of 57, he died of disease and starvation while serving the Lord on Picton island at the southern tip of South America, and when they found his body, they found his journal, his diary nearby. It bore the record of hunger, of thirst, of weariness, of wounds, of loneliness. The last entry in his little journal showed the struggle of a shaking hand as he tried to write legibly. It read this, "I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God."

Are you? Even in the storms of life, do we look up and say, "The Lord is good"? The Lord is essentially good. The Lord is eternally good. The Lord is expressively good. The psalmist says, "Thou art good and doest good." God is good and he does good things. He extends his goodness to others.

Have you ever thought about how God expresses his goodness? Listen, God displays his goodness in creation. I've been reading the opening chapters of Genesis in these days, and so have you if you follow M'Cheyne's daily reading of the Bible, and seven times in the book of Genesis God said that what he made was good, "And God saw all that he made, and, behold it was very good." I mean, how can you look out at the beauty of God's creation and deny that it's good? The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

The Lord expresses his goodness in creation. The Lord expresses his goodness in formation, and the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground. God has made you, this morning, with eyes to see and ears to hear and a nose to smell. He's even given you taste-buds that you might taste. He's given you a mind to comprehend. He's given you a hand to touch. There is no end to the goodness of God.

God's goodness is expressed in creation. God's goodness is expressed in formation. God's goodness is expressed in salvation. Titus says, "But after that the kindness, the goodness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us."

God's goodness is expressed in inspiration for we hold in our hands, this morning, the inspired word of God which the scriptures call good.

God's goodness is expressed in provision. Paul speaking to a group of unbelievers in the city of Lystra said this, "God did good, he gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Unsaved people have a tendency to exploit the goodness of God, exploit it for their own ends, take it for granted and exploit it for their own ends, but what about us? Do we appreciate his goodness? Do you enjoy his blessings? Do you glorify his name? Do you say with the psalmist, "Oh how great is thy goodness, Which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee"?

God is so good. God is so good. God is so good. He's so good to me. Here we see God personally. Look at verse 7 again, "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble." Here we see God powerfully, a strong hold in the day of trouble. The psalmist says, "God hath spoken once; Twice have I heard this; That power belongeth unto God."

Friends, is it not encouraging as we step out into the unknown future of 2010 to realize that we have such a powerful God? Think of what we will face in the future. Tribulation. It's described in verse 7 how to look at it, trouble. God's people are not immune from trouble despite what the health-and-wealth gospelers tell us.

Nahum predicted the fall of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and that took place in 612 BC, but come back a few years before that even took place. The year is 701 BC and this

great international bully is threatening tiny little Judah, and the king of Assyria is a man whose name strikes terror into the hearts of all in the Mediterranean world, his name is Sennacherib. He's exploiting and expanding his kingdom. He's already taken the northern kingdom to the north, and now the Assyrian troops are surrounding the battlements of Jerusalem. They're hurling their abuse. They're shouting to the folk on the wall, "We have heard about the God you serve. We are told that he's very special. Why don't you send him out to fight us? What about the nations, the gods of the nations that we have destroyed? What's so special about your God?" And then they send a menacing letter to the king, and you remember the king takes it and he just lays it out before the Lord, he leaves it all with God and he waits, and the ominous moments tick by as the Assyrians surround the city of Jerusalem and then God intervenes. And in one night, through one angel, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers are slain, and when the break of day comes, the people of Judah are leaning over the battlements of Jerusalem and as they look out, behold they're all dead corpses. It's a red-letter day in the land of Judah, and, my dear friends, a red-letter Psalm is written to commemorate it, for as the people of God look over the battlements of Jerusalem, they cry, "God is our refuge and strength He's a very present help in trouble."

That's what you and I are going to face in this new year. We're going to face trouble. The word "trouble" means "to be in a tight place." Here was Judah, they were backed into a corner where escape seemed impossible. They were between a rock and a hard place. I wonder is that where you are this morning? Has the new year barely begun and you're in trouble? The Hebrew language uses 30 words that describes various kinds of trouble. I wonder what kind of trouble you're in this morning. Could it be that you're facing financial trouble? Maybe it's trouble do with your family? Maybe it's domestic trouble? Maybe it's trouble at work? Maybe it's trouble due to unemployment? Maybe it's that personal problem, it's that physical problem that's keeping you awake at night? I wonder this morning, has life tumbled in for you?

You know, life is just like a grapefruit squirt, you cut into it and you're not sure where it will land. Sooner or later the bottom will fall out. Sooner or later the landmarks will disappear. Like financial security, like employment, like a parent, like your health, sooner or later the unexpected will come. You see, this morning, you and I are either in the middle of a storm, we've just come out of a storm, or we're about to go into a storm, and as we enter this new year, we certainly will encounter the inevitable storms of life. What we will face in the future is tribulation but look at the verse, what we will find in the future is consolation, he's a strong hold in the day of trouble.

You know the words of the old song,

"Where can I go, O where can i go?
Seeking a refuge for my soul
Needing a friend who'll love me to the end
Where can I go but to the Lord?"

Do you see that word "strong hold" in verse 7? It means "a fortified place or refuge." Are you facing trouble? Have you fled to this refuge? My friends, is this concept, is this idea not sprinkled throughout the Old Testament? You remember the words of Deuteronomy, "The eternal God is thy refuge, underneath are the everlasting arms." The psalmist says, "I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and fortress; in him will I trust." He says, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my strength. In whom will I trust."

Have you learned through experience that God is your guaranteed refuge? Sure, we try other alternatives. At the first sign of trouble, we try to find an answer with our own resources, and then when that fails, we call on family and friends. My friends, the ultimate solution is not found in these options, the answer is in the midst of us, the Lord of Hosts is with us and he's a strong hold in the day of trouble.

"How often the conflict when pressed by the foe,
Have I fled to my Refuge and breathed out my woe.
How often, when trials like sea billows roll,
Have I hidden in Thee, O Thou Rock of my soul."

Do you realize, dear burdened believer, this morning, that as you step out into this new year that you've a place in which you can hide? Do you recognize that you've a person that you can hold onto? Do you see that you've a protection that you have in the uncertain times of life? When difficulty and danger came upon Martin Luther and Phillip Melancthon, the two architects of the Reformation, Luther would say to Phillip, "Phillip, let's sing the 46th Psalm." And the two of them would bring out the metric version of that Psalm and they would sing to the glory of God. My friends, what a mighty awesome refuge our God is for this time, for Luther's time, for all time. The Lord is good. He's a strong hold in the day of trouble.

Here we see God personally, "The LORD is good." Here we see God powerfully, he's "a strong hold in the day of trouble." Here we see God perceptively, "he knoweth them that trust in him." In other words, he knows all about you and me. He hasn't lost sight of us. You remember the words of the psalmist, "Great is our Lord and of great power; his understanding is infinite." There is no limit, this morning, to the knowledge of God and this one who knows all things, the omniscient God, he knows us intimately and he's not only the Lord but he's good, and that means that in every experience of life we can say, "It's all right, the Lord knows me, he knows all about me, he knows what he's doing."

Will you just ponder those last words for a moment or two before we finish. Look at them, "he knoweth them that trust in him." Here's the assurance of his possession, God knows those who trust in him. Paul puts it like this, "The Lord knoweth them that are his." He knows, this morning, that I belong to him, that he'll never let me go, he'll never give me up, he'll never cast me out. I am eternally secure.

"The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose.
He will not, he will not desert to his foes.

That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
He'll never, no never, no never forsake."

He knoweth them that trust in him. Here is the assurance of his possession, here's the assurance, my dear friends, of his purpose, he knows them that trust in him and that implies that he's a purpose for our lives. You know, no man in the Bible outside of the Lord Jesus suffered more than Job, and one day he lost his fortune, then he lost his family, and then he lost his fitness, and then to add insult to injury, he lost his friends. And then one day he went from sunshine to rain, he went from gain to pain, he went from blessedness to brokenness, he went from insulation to isolation, he went from happiness to heartache, and yet from that tempestuous sea of adversity Job cries, "But he knows the way that I take and when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." In effect Job is saying, "Everything is all right. God is working out his purpose for my life."

Who knows what 2010 will bring for any of us. God knows. Are you content to leave this year that looms before us in the hands of God to say with the poet,

"My Father's way may twist and turn, my heart may throb and ache
But in my soul I'm glad I know, He maketh no mistake."

He knoweth them that trust in him, the assurance of his possession, the assurance of his purpose, the assurance of his provision. With spiraling cost and increasing unemployment, maybe you're concerned how to make ends meet. I wonder is it the necessities of life that concern you. You remember that when the Lord Jesus was speaking about food and clothing, he made this marvelous statement, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." My friend, I just want you to see the God that you worship this morning, the God who has redeemed you through the blood of his Son, this God is our God forever and ever. He'll be our guide even unto death. He knoweth them that trust in him, the assurance of his possession, the assurance of his purpose, the assurance of his provision, the assurance of his providence. He knoweth them that trust in him.

You know, my dear friends, he doesn't need a computer to record your name. Actually, this morning, he's got it written on his heart. He's got your name written on his hands. He's got your name graven on the palms of your hands. Aren't you glad, this morning, that God knows who you are? Isn't it incredible? Isn't it unbelievable that the God of creation, the God of providence, the God of history, the God of prophecy, the God of destiny, he knows your name, that he knows the very hairs on your head by number? He knows you intimately.

My dear friends, if God knows the numbers on your head, don't you think that he's up-to-date with the larger issues of life? Don't you think he knows exactly how you feel and cares deeply? God knows you. He perceives you. You've heard the old saying out of sight, out of mind, you're never out of his sight, you're never off his mind. What an encouragement to start the new year with. "The LORD is good," here we see God personally. "A strong hold in the day of trouble," here we see God powerfully. "And he

knoweth them that trust in him," here we see God perceptively. A. W. Tozer says, "With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack?" The answer is nothing. This God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even unto death.

Let's pray.