

The Wonder of a New Morning

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Bible Text: Jonah 3:10b
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Our scripture reading for this morning's service comes to us from the book of Jonah and the third chapter, and we begin reading at verse 1. Jonah 3:1 through 10. Jonah 3:1,

1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, 2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. 3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. 4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. 5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. 6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? 10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

Thus far our reading of God's holy, infallible and precious word. May he bless his truth to our hearts.

Dear congregation, on behalf of the consistory, I wish each and every one of you a blessed new year, and our heart's desire is that this might be a year in which the Lord would come with his favor not only to each and every one of you individually, but also to you as a congregation, especially as you gather around God's infallible and precious and effectual word, that he would often grace you with blessings of which his storehouse is so full.

"When morning lights the eastern skies, O Lord, thy mercy show." These words should serve as a prayer for every day, not in the least when we come to the morning of this new year. When morning lights the eastern skies, my greatest need is for mercy and every morning that does light our sky calls to mind the sun which God has given to rise on the just and the unjust. Every new morning calls to mind that the Lord's compassions fail not. They are new every morning. A morning outside of paradise is a gift for any fallen child of Adam. And the time on which he should pray, "O Lord, thy mercy show," but a new morning is especially welcome when there has been the threatening of a stormy night and when it is exchanged with a bright morning as we see in the words of our text in the chapter that was read in your hearing, Jonah 3:10, and our text can be found in the last five words of Jonah 3:10, these words, "and he did it not." And he did it not. Our theme with the Lord's help this morning is "The Wonder of a New Morning." We'll see, first of all, the grace before this wonder; the greatness, secondly, of this wonder; and thirdly, the giver of this wonder. The wonder of a new morning: the grace before this wonder; the greatness of this wonder; and the giver of this wonder.

First of all, then, the grace before this wonder. Our text, dear congregation, is a great and auspicious wonder, "and he did it not." But this is not the only wonder in our passage, there is much grace throughout this entire chapter and we need to see this for grace comes not only in a single flower, it comes usually in bouquets, in bunches, for the Lord loves to overwhelm with his grace. And we see here in our first point five instances of the Lord's grace to an undeserving people. First of all, we see a graced servant of the Lord. Congregation, the Lord's servants at their best are just Jonah's. Never forget that. Jonah himself had disobeyed the Lord's commandment to preach to Nineveh and instead of obeying the Lord he had fled westward, and he had thus exposed himself to the judgment of God. And though the Lord had dealt with him, chastising him, casting him even there into the belly of the fish, Jonah cries from the belly of hell and the Lord has not yet just dealt with him in justice but he has united his mercy with his justice, and from the belly of hell Jonah cried and his cry went even into the Lord's temple on the basis of the sacrifice. A mystery of all mysteries. Jonah is brought out of the belly of the whale, and he is brought even in the belly of the whale to confess that salvation belongeth unto the Lord.

What ways the Lord has to go with us before we confess such a thing, that all those who observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. And so, when the whale vomited Jonah onto the dry ground at the behest of the Lord a second time, Jonah, who had not seen the light of a day for three days and three nights, he would no doubt have welcomed the wonder of a new morning with great and intense gladness. "The cords of death held me in deep despair," he could have said. "The pangs of hell, like waves by tempest driven, rolled o'er my soul; by grief and sorrow driven. Brought nigh to death, in him I found salvation. Come, thou my soul, relieved from agitation, turn to thy rest; the Lord has favored thee." And so, here stands a graced messenger of the Lord. The Lord's grace has gone before Nineveh, and if the Lord has spared Jonah, may there not then also be hope for Nineveh?

This, then, is the first instance of grace, a graced messenger of the Lord. But secondly, there is a gracious wonder of preaching for Jonah entered this great and massive and wicked city, and preached the preaching that God bade him yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. You say, "Is that a gracious preaching from the Lord?" Well, this melancholy refrain through the streets and the marketplaces of Nineveh was indeed a gracious message, for here was a preacher who, in a certain sense, had died and risen again, you could say, and here was a preacher who could say with the Apostle Paul, knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. Here was a man who brought the message that the Lord had given him to bring. And yes, his message was solemn and sober and slender in a certain sense, and yet it was the Lord's message, and if it is the Lord's message in time then it is ultimately a gracious message, because anything outside of hell, no matter how warning it is, no matter how threatening it is, it is a warning in place and instead of the judgment. It's a warning before the judgment and it's not the judgment itself and so it is gracious, as these people well came to understand.

And so we have here not only a graced messenger, but we have a gracious preaching. But as I said, the Lord continues with his grace because we see here, thirdly, the grace of repentance. In many places, the preaching of Jonah would not have been accepted or heeded, but here the Lord gives a receptive audience. The Ninevites from the greatest even unto the least declare a fast, and they put on them sackcloth as a sign of mourning. Even the king himself gets off his throne, puts off his royal vesture, puts on sackcloth and sits in the dust. A deep sorrow sweeps over the hearts of the whole nation. They are truly convicted of their sin not only, but they are grief-stricken about how they have offended this God of Jonah. And we read here in our text these amazing words that they believed God. Oh, what a grace lies behind that. They believed God and were gripped by an awareness of God's majesty, of his power, and of his just displeasure.

"For without faith it is impossible to please God," we read, "and him that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." These Ninevites could have laughed Jonah to scorn like Lot's son-in-law did on the eve of the judgment there of Sodom, but not so these Ninevites. They had learned that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. By light from on high, they realized their spiritual danger. The fact dawned on them that they had to answer before an omnipotent and a holy God. God's grace was at work in their hearts and in their lives.

A graced messenger, a gracious preaching, and the grace of repentance but, fourthly, we see here under our first point" the grace of changed behavior for not only, and this is key, congregation, was there a heartfelt sorrow for sin on the part of these Ninevites, there was also a hatred of sin and a fleeing from sin. And the king took the lead. He said, as it were, "Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock taste anything. Do not let them eat or drink, but let every man be covered with sackcloth and let all call upon God. Cry mightily unto God and let each give up his or her evil ways and our violence. Who knows, the Lord may yet repent and return with compassion and come and give us a blessing that we perish not." Well, congregation, do you see here the grace of a changed behavior. This is truly a wide-scale awakening like we have seen in the past both north and south of the

49th parallel. This is not just an outward trepidation at judgment, but here we see a true reformation of life or, in other words, the bringing forth of the fruits of repentance as John the Baptist called for, "Bring therefore forth fruits of repentance and say not among yourselves, we have Abraham as our father." Congregation, is it not truly grace when there is not only a sincere sorrow for sin that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of the Lord and kept none of them, and I'm inclined unto all evil, but when there comes this hearty hatred of sin, and this fleeing from sins in our lives, which is exactly which comes about in the lives of these Ninevites.

We have a grace messenger, and a gracious preaching, and a gracious repentance and a grace, the grace of changed behavior, but we have added to this all fifthly and lastly here: the grace of a living hope. Oh, wonder of all wonders. There is not only here a sorrow for sin and a resolve to change their wicked ways, but there was a turning away from man and a looking to God alone. You see, congregation, we do need to despair of ever changing ourselves, of ever looking to ourselves. We need to lose all that hope entirely, and until that is done, we are never ready for that hope of which the gospel is so brimful. And yet these people with this slender preaching, they entertained a hope, didn't they, that God might yet turn and spare them. "Who can tell? The Lord may yet repent and we will not perish."

This king of Nineveh, congregation, was taught from above, wasn't he? He was here a partaker of that ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. Even in this melancholy preaching, "yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown by light from on high," this king discerns a message of grace and a sliver of hope. Yet 40 days. Why would the Lord give them 40 days? Why would not the judgment of God simply come down upon them? Congregation, do you see here how there is an apprehension of the Lord's mercy which is always there in true repentance? An apprehension of mercy from the God of heaven. Oh, these Ninevites grieved after a godly sort and they saw in this messenger of grace a sign, the sign of Jonah, that the Lord might yet have mercy upon the likes of them.

Well, congregation as we close this first point, I ask you is this not the way forward in 2016? Oh, we need such grace, don't we? Messenger and people alike, we need grace before grace, don't we? We need to learn to need grace in order to be able to live out of grace. We have not deserved the morning of a new day. We have not deserved the breath that we have breathed even today. Oh, how this behooves, how this should make us live close to the Lord and to his word. We have so much more than these Ninevites and yet do we live in the dust as they do? Is this not where we should find ourselves in 2060, in the dust before God? To seek it from him? To seek a life outside of ourselves? To seek for this true repentance which he can give? Oh, what a mercy it would be if at the beginning of this new year there would be here found in Hamilton a people in the dust before God condemning themselves, hating their sin and fleeing from it, and crying mightily unto God, not hoping in themselves or in their own devices, but in the Lord, with whom there is mercy.

This would be a grace so amazing and it would pave the way also for more grace, as we see in our second point: the greatness of this wonder. Congregation, we see how a new

situation arose in Nineveh upon the hearing of the prophet's preaching. The people sentence themselves to death, as it were. They clothed themselves with sackcloth, and from the highest echelons of government down to the lowest of the children, and also the beasts of the field, they are all together. There the nation was in mourning and in fasting. They threw themselves upon the mercy of God and God beheld from heaven and God saw what they had done, for he had worked it in them, and he had compassion, and he did not bring upon them the destruction that he had threatened. And so we see here in this 10th verse amazing words. We read here, "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

Yes, you read that right, God repented of the evil that he said that he would do unto them, and he did it not. But what does that mean, you say? The Lord cannot repent, can he? He cannot change his mind? Well, indeed you are true. You are right, God is unchangeable, as the Bible says, "I, the Lord, change not." His decree will stand. He will do all his pleasure, he says. And James says with the Lord there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. The Lord remains the same yesterday, today and forever, and God works out everything according to his sovereign good pleasure. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

Well, how then can we understand this, that it repented the Lord, that the Lord repented of the evil which he said that he would do? Well, congregation, and this is amazing, the Lord here stoops to our creatureliness and to our finite minds. He speaks our language when we see here that he repented. Calvin says that the Lord is like a nurse who lifts over the crib of a baby sounds that are so far beneath her and yet which the baby will understand. And so the Lord in his word does exactly the same in order to make his will manifest unto us, we who are frail and wretched creatures ourselves. The Lord comes and he stoops and he speaks in such words and phrases that you and I, fallen as we are, frail as we are, can understand.

Do you see here the character of the Lord on this first day of 2016? Even here in the language which he uses, he is so eager to be entreated. And this he does throughout the scriptures. You have read it and heard it many times, he condescended to our low estate. The Lord stretches out his hand to needy sinners. He shines upon them with the light of his face. In the scriptures, he is said to awake and arise to draw near and to come and dwell among us. As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. The Lord shows us his heart in the scriptures and he allows sinful creatures like you and me to take hold of him, take hold of him, to touch the hem of his garment, to lay our sins before him and to fill our mouths with arguments even in his presence and to say, as one did, "Truth, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table." And the Lord lets himself be entreated by such wretched, poor, and needy creatures as you and me.

Well, congregation, do you see here your God this morning in the scriptures? He takes this word to himself lest you would think that he is a God who will inexorably judge, he says, "And it repented me of the evil that I thought to do." Oh no, the Lord in his infinite

wisdom and power will never change his mind or alter his decree for his secret will will never change but that does not mean that what he comes and declares to us in his revealed will he doesn't do in order to have us change, and when he works that change in your and in my heart and he answers it with his mercy, oh no, he has not changed. Not at all. He is fulfilling his secret decree by his revealed decree and by the change which he works in sinner's hearts and he renders them no longer obnoxious to his judgment. No, when we read here that the Lord changed, it is simply a condescension of the Lord to say, "I make you change and when you are changed, as I make you change, then, yes, to you it appears as if I have changed and I'm willing to come under that emblem in order that you understand the greatness of my grace and the greatness of my mercy."

Well, congregation, do you see here on the first day of 2016 that the warnings that come to you that you hear so regularly and faithfully from this pulpit, we trust, they are designed to lead you to repentance, not to be repented of. It says God says to Jeremiah in another passage in chapter 18, "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Oh, that this were written over all the preaching that you would hear, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will you die?" All the threatenings that come to you Lord's Day after Lord's Day, they are the Lord aiming, seeking to change a wicked people. And when they are changed then his heart also will be revealed as having changed towards them. "I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them."

Well, congregation, are the Lord's ways not much higher than our ways? Are his thoughts not so much higher than our thoughts? And ought this not to be an encouragement to us on this first day of this new year that we would turn and run towards the Lord to seek forgiveness with him and a new life from out of him, to find that place in the dust before the Lord where all God's threatenings are aimed to bring us that we would awaken to our unbelief and to our wickedness and awaken also to the grace of the Lord? This is what happened there in Nineveh and picture it with me for a moment, children, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed." What would you do if you heard that? Forty days from now, about mid-February, it would be the end of all things. Would you find that place in the dust before God? Would you go through these days, 39, 38, 37, 30? The 30 turns into 20 and the 20 turns into 10. And then 5. And then 4, 3, 2, 1. It's the 40th day in Nineveh. Every man, woman and child is in the dust before God anticipating the worst. God has every right to judge them. Crying mightily unto God. Hour after hour creeps by. Then we reach the end of the 40th day. And the clock strikes 12. And Nineveh, Nineveh still stands. A minute passes, 2 minutes pass. What would these families have done? No doubt the fathers would have said something like this to their children, "And he did it not! He did it not! This God of justice who could easily have overthrown us 40 days ago, he gave us the space of repentance and he did it not." Oh, congregation, can't you picture with me how these people would have taken to the streets with one thing on their mouth, "And he did it not! And he did it not!" The children in the streets, "He didn't do it! He didn't do it!" And together this chorus rises from Nineveh, "And he did it not!"

Oh congregation, what mercy, "He did it not." Do you know that in your life in truth, that relief and comfort that comes over your soul? "Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me. Miracle of all miracles, I looked into hell where I deserved to be but there is the wonder of a new morning. A new day opens up as if the gates of paradise once again are opened. And he did it not." Oh congregation, the greatness of the Lord's mercy, it is new every morning. Is this not how you and I ought to learn by God's grace to live in this new year?

"And he did it not." Is it a wonder in your soul this morning, is this the refrain of your heart, "And he did it not"? If it is, then your focus this morning on this first day of this new year will be on the one who magnifies himself in his own grace and this is which we want to see here in our third and final point: the giver of this wonder. Congregation, he did it not. He, the great God, the author of everything, the God who deserves to be everlastingly worshiped, he did it not. The great God of justice who is angry with the wicked every day, he did it not. The God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he did it not. Oh, can you say with Micah this morning, "Who is a God like unto thee which pardon iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of thy heritage. He retaineth not his anger forever because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again. He will have compassion upon us. He will subdue our iniquities." Has that been a comfort to you, people of God? He will subdue our iniquities, "And thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

Oh congregation, there can be no greater message in 2016, he did it not. This is the Lord. He is the same. He indeed does not change. He is the God of mercy to a sinful people like Nineveh. And remember here that Jonah was assigned to the Ninevites. He had been in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights. Some people think that these juices there in the belly of the whale may have so begun to affect him, may have bleached him that he appeared there as coming from another world. However it was, he was a sinner just like you and like me. But this man was a sign, he was a sign to these people of how the Lord is able to save to the uttermost. And the Lord Jesus Christ when people came asking for a sign, he says, "You will have no other sign than the sign of Jonah who was in the earth for three days and three nights." And so the Son of man would be in the grave for three days and three nights and, congregation, this Son of God is coming among us in the garments of his word this morning on this first day of this new year, and he comes and he speaks unto each and every one of you and he says, "A greater than Jonah is here." Do you not hear how he speaks so much louder than Jonah? And yes, he calls us to repentance because he has been appointed to judge this world in righteousness, and it may very well be in this year 2016 that the Lord will come and tear back the clouds and appear in judgment to judge the living and the dead.

But before he does so, he comes yet once more, and he says, "A greater than Jonah is here. In the gospel I am the God-man," he says, "where justice and mercy have met together, where righteousness and peace have kissed each other, where God's judgment is justly satisfied, and his wrath is pacified." And now in compassion he can deal with sinners, he can reconcile them to himself through his Son, "where God is pleased to have all fullness dwell in Christ, and to reconcile unto himself through his Son sinners of all

stripes, making peace through his blood shed on the cross." Oh, congregation, there's no better place to start a new year than at Calvary where we have this Son of God in our nature, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and he calls out as he does in the preaching of the gospel from the cross and he commands every man everywhere to repent.

And so this message reaches you and me this morning. I ask you, what will you do with this Lord Jesus Christ? My dear believer, this morning you have a new day because of him. He did it not This is the morning of the wonder of the cross. He did it to Christ that he might not do it to you. What a wonder when the Lord works that in your heart and in your life by the sovereign application of the Holy Spirit. Then hoping against all hope and fearing against all fear, we discover something in sovereign grace, he did it not. What a morning of wonder comes into your soul when the. Lord does that. He did it to him who deserved to have an eternal morning of bliss in the bosom of his Father, and he went into the dark night of Calvary, the dark and eternal night of dereliction in order that there might be this morning of a new day for sinners like me and I might cry out, "He did it not!"

Oh congregation, don't you think for the people of God this wonder will last forever. Every morning speaks of it. But also that morning when God brings you through death, when you awake in righteousness at last, child of God, to come to that other side, won't the first words on your mouth be, "He did it not"? And to stand there before the judgment seat of Christ and to hear that glorious and gracious sentence, "Come, ye blessed of my Father." Oh, to answer it and to say, "And he did it not."

Congregation, do you see how the eternal wonder of all the saints already at the right hand of God and throughout all eternity, how it can break through even into our world today in the way of true repentance and of faith, even on this morning of this new day, and the song of wonder may be in your heart, "And he did it not!" This song will go on world without end. Child of God, live this year in adoration of the cross, live this year in adoration of the God who thought it all out, live in adoration of a God who is willing to be entreated in true repentance. And live every day out of Calvary and camp there for there written over the cross is, "And he did it to him that he might not do it to you." And congregation, then live in expectation as well for he who has begun a good work will perform it to the end. Do not lose your expectation in him. Lose it from yourself. Yes, lose it this morning from yourself, but do not lose it from him. He who has begun will finish it. For then the morning of eternity is already broken into your life, and no matter what clouds come over your life in this year, no matter what hides the sun, the sun of a new day has begun to shine, child of God, in your life. Don't seek it with yourself but seek it with him he. He, he did it not.

But others of you, congregation, I must warn you as well because if you are not like Nineveh today in dust before the Lord, then you cannot take this comfort to yourself this morning, for then the judgment of the Lord is still on its way, and it may not be 40 days, it may be much less than that for you. Oh congregation, remember how different it was with the world at the flood. Then the Lord did it. Then none but Noah and his eight could

say the Lord did it not for the Lord did come with his judging hand. Remember how it was with Sodom, how the fire and brimstone came down and the smoke reached unto the heavens. Then you couldn't say the Lord didn't do it, for the Lord did do it. Remember how it was with Jerusalem who had the ministry of a greater than Jonah, the Lord Jesus Christ. How oft he would he have gathered her chick says a hen gathers her chicks under her wings but they would not. And the day of her destruction came and the Lord did it, congregation, the Lord did it and the Lord will do so also for you who continue on in unrepentance. Oh, hear the call on this first day of a new year.

Congregation, look one last time with me at these Ninevites, men, women and children and beasts. There they are all of them in dust and ashes. Do you know that you will meet them again? The Lord Jesus says the men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment and they will condemn all those who repented not. Picture it with me there before the Great White Throne, there is the whole company of the Ninevites and there they stand and there the congregation of Hamilton will stand. There will all, who have been under the preaching of the gospel stand. Will those Ninevites rejoice with you or will their hands be pointed at you and say, "We repented at the preaching of Jonah and you had a greater than Jonah." Oh congregation, they will rise in the judgment, they will rise in the judgment. Oh, friends, where shall 2016 find us, in the dust before God, and then we will find, and he did it not. Oh friends, turn from your evil ways. Do not delay. The worst thing you can do is to delay. But if you put on Christ as the apostle says, and make no provision for the flesh, then you can live, then you can praise the Lord, for then old things have passed away, all things have become new because of the God who did it not. Amen.