

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Jonah chapter 3. Last time we considered Jonah's second calling to go unto Nineveh and to preach against them, and unlike the first time the Lord called Jonah to this task, this time he obeys. The prophet went throughout that great city and began to proclaim the Word of the Lord unto them saying, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Jonah walked through the streets of the city and called that wicked people unto repentance. As we will see here in our text this morning, that call to repentance was heard by the people of Nineveh and was received. Friends, this is nothing short of a miracle of God that a nation so well known for its utter wickedness would heed the Word of God and turn to Him in genuine repentance for their sins. So with that in mind give your attention now to the reading of God's holy Word from Jonah chapter 3 beginning at verse 5.

Read Jonah 3:5-10

Pray

I want you to imagine the worst government you can think of. Some of you may be thinking of the Communist Party of China. For those in my parents' generation it may be the Soviet Union. For those of an even earlier generation it may be Nazi Germany. Now that you have that government in mind I want you to think what it would be like if they had repented on a corporate national level. Can you image what it would be like if Xi Jinping were to denounce communism and its atheistic foundations and submitted to Christ? Imagine the one and half billion people of China able to worship Jehovah freely and openly with the support and protection of the government. What if Joseph Stalin and the Kremlin had repented of the millions slaughtered and swore to govern according to Scripture? Imagine the force for the Gospel that the nearly 300 million people of the Soviet Union would have had if they had embraced the true religion, and how much warfare and destruction would have been avoided under such a state. What if Hitler had taken off his iron cross and fallen prostrate before the cross of Christ, putting an end to the hatred and bloodshed that ravished

Europe? 20 million war casualties and 6 million Jews would have lived to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the call to embrace it. The course of world events would have changed drastically. That's exactly what we see here in Jonah chapter 3. Nineveh was a major power within the Assyrian Empire, and the Lord did a miraculous work in them. I'm not going to stand here today and say this type of change is going to happen often. We may never see it happen even within our lifetimes. But the Lord can and does radically change even the vilest of nations in this world, and He uses us ordinary men and women as instruments in that change. The charge to you here today, dear brothers and sisters, is fulfill your duty in calling nations unto repentance. I know this can be a daunting task, so I want you to be encouraged and equipped by the example of Jonah in our text. Fulfill your duty in calling nations unto repentance. And we'll consider this by looking at three aspects of this duty: the basis for national repentance, the act of national repentance, and the grace in national repentance.

Let us first consider the basis for national repentance. For some of you here this may be something that is completely foreign to you. You may have never heard preaching on this duty of nations to repent and turn to the Lord. This may even be something that goes against what you believe to be the role of civil government. And yet Scripture plainly teaches that there is a duty for nations, not just individuals, but nations as corporate persons to repent of their sins and turn to Christ. Consider Psalm 2 which we sang earlier. In verse 6 we read, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." Jehovah has set His anointed one, Christ Jesus, to be king upon His holy hill of Zion. The Lord Jesus Christ is established as king over all things, over all men, even over all nations. This is confirmed in Daniel 9:25 in which Christ Jesus is referred to as Messiah the Prince. And yes, this is where William Symington got the title of his book which is probably the most extensive treatment of this doctrine that has been written. I would wholeheartedly recommend it to you. But you may be thinking to yourself that these are just Old Testament passages that have to do with Israel and the Lord being

king over His people. In Ephesians 1:21-23 we see the same teaching of Christ, who it is said the Lord made Him “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” All principality, and power, and might, and dominion, is a figure of speech known as a synecdoche in which the different parts are given as a representative of the whole. It is saying that Christ is far above every authority or ruler or king or nation there is. And this is made even more clear in Revelation 19:16 where Christ is given the title King of kings and Lord of lords.

But these say nothing of national repentance, only that Christ is King over nations. Consider again Psalm 2:10-12, “Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” This is Jehovah declaring to Gentile kings that they are to serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. This is something that cannot be done if they are still committed to their wicked ways. In fact, it’s given in contrast to their actions in verses 2-3, “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” The Lord is calling them to no longer rage against Him and plot against the Messiah, but instead now to serve Him with fear, and to rejoice with trembling. How can this be anything other than a call for repentance? They are called to “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” They are to pay homage to Him, to bend their knee in submission to Him as ones who are subjects to Him. We are told that this is how they are instructed to flee from the wrath to come. There is no other means

of escaping the just fury of Jehovah against the wicked than to repent from that wickedness and turn unto Him.

Friends, the magistrate has a religious duty. This may seem absurd to our 21st century minds, but this is because our culture has so bought into secularism. And yet this is the clear teaching of the Word of God. What are the magistrates called in Romans 13? We see there that the magistrate is ordained by God and is a minister of God. And if you would have asked virtually any Christian just a few hundred years ago they would have been in full agreement with all of these things. And yet, in our modern society most Christians scoff at the notion that magistrates have a religious duty and are to support, promote, and protect the true religion as Isaiah 49:23 tells us, “And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.” All you have to do is go online to various social media platforms and see the open hostility that is being expressed in conversations concerning Christian Nationalism. And just as an aside, this is not me endorsing the Christian Nationalist movement, something which I’ve said many times is a cheap imitation of the Biblical doctrine Christ’s mediatorial kingship and national covenanting. I bring it up only because in those conversations the vast majority of people have almost visceral reactions towards the thought of having Christian magistrates and Christian nations. Yet the Scriptures are clear that this is a duty placed upon all kings and nations, and one which can only be achieved by seeing national repentance. And this has been done before. The Roman Empire to an extent did this. The Dutch did this during the time of the Reformation, establishing a Reformed nation and church. Perhaps the most famous example for us is the covenanted nation of Scotland during the Second Reformation. Even many of the states in America did this, as is evidenced by their constitutions. National repentance is not just a pipe dream that we wish would happen, it is something that is commanded, is

prophesied will take place, and in many instances has happened in the past. And here is Nineveh is such an instance.

So let us now turn to consider the act of national repentance in verses 5-9, “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. 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. 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: 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. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” The people of Nineveh heeded the call to repentance, and their obedience was plain to see. There was a profound belief in God that led to a recognition of their national sins, the evil ways and violence that had plagued their society for too long. They responded by donning sackcloth and ashes, mourning deeply for the transgressions they had committed, and fervently praying that their repentance would stay the hand of the Lord's judgment. No class or section of Ninevite society felt exempt from the need to humble itself before God. It did not matter one's social status or background, all were called to humble themselves and show forth pattern of repentance. It's a powerful testament to what true godly repentance looks like. It is faithful preaching of God's Word and the attentive hearing of it result in the people believing in God. Their faith then compels them to take decisive action and turn away from their specific sins, thus demonstrating the transformative power of genuine repentance unto life. What a beautiful visible example we are given of what true godly repentance looks like.

And notice that the call to repentance makes its way all the way to the king and he puts down a decree of national repentance,

calling the people to do what it is that they were already doing. Jonah didn't try to enact legislation to bring about change in Nineveh. He wasn't out there fighting some mythical culture war, using the same edgy tactics as the world. No, he used the pure, inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God to bring about change. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebrews 4:12. One author states, "There are springs of evil in the human soul, that cannot be touched by legal enactments, or scholastic discipline. A true and abiding recognition of God, as the supreme power of life, as ever near to the soul, is the only worthy motive of a true repentance." Just as a quick aside, its interesting the see the structure of the text here concerning the actions of the king of Nineveh. "He arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." He stood up, took off, put on, and sat down. The sequence of the actions of the king show how everything he was doing what an act of repentance. He was visibly proclaiming that the Word of the Lord had caused a change in him. When the Word of God goes out, it never returns void. Brothers and sisters, you must be encouraged in fulfilling this duty because the Lord is faithful to bring people unto repentance. When the Word goes out a work is done. Trust the Lord to make the Word effectual in the hearts and lives of those who hear it. Proclaim the call and anticipate the act of repentance.

If we were to see nations repent, if we were to see our own nation repent, the there would be sure evidences of it. It would look an awful lot like what we see the king of Nineveh doing, setting forth a decree that the nation would repent and fast in humiliation before the Lord. Matthew Poole writes, "Works, not words, are sure signs of what men are humbling themselves to the dust, extraordinary fasting, and crying unto God, these were some of their works; but God saw more than these external, professing works." It is the magistrate that is to lead the people of the nation in repentance. The political leaders of the nation are the ones who are responsible as

heads of the nation to recognize the sins of the people corporately and to call the people unto repentance. In fact, this is what we used to see even here in America. President John Adams called for the people of the United States to, “with the deepest humility, acknowledge before God the manifold sins and transgressions with which we are justly chargeable as individuals and as a nation, beseeching Him at the same time, of His infinite grace, through the Redeemer of the World, freely to remit all our offenses, and to incline us by His Holy Spirit to that sincere repentance and reformation which may afford us reason to hope for his inestimable favor and heavenly benediction.” President Abraham Lincoln did this in 1963, “It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness. Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30th. day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. And I do hereby request all the People to abstain, on that day, from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.” Even as recently as Woodrow Wilson, who on the brink of world war exhorted his “fellow-citizens of all faiths and creeds to assemble on that day in their several places of worship and there, as well as in their homes, to pray Almighty God that He may forgive our sins... and to purpose only those righteous acts and judgments which are in conformity with His will.” Oh, may the Lord see fit to once again bring us to humiliation and repentance, not just individually, but as a nation.

And lastly, let us consider the grace in national repentance. Verse 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.” It was the Lord’s grace that gave the call to repentance for Jonah to proclaim; it was the Lord’s

grace that enabled the people and nation of Nineveh to display the act of repentance; and it was the Lord's grace in bringing about His own 'repentance.' This doesn't mean the Lord would have been wrong in destroying Nineveh, and it doesn't mean He erred in saying they would be destroyed. Saying that the Lord repented of the evil, or that He relented as other translations put it, is a way of speaking in which human characteristics or emotions are attributed to God to help our understanding. The Lord is just, and He would have been just in destroying the wicked within Nineveh. But He is also just in that He will not destroy the righteous with the wicked. We saw that in God's saving Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact, this was all hinted at even within the call to repentance, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" The term 'overthrown' is used in reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But that is not the only meaning this word could take; it doesn't have to mean destroy. The root of the word means 'to turn,' so it can also mean 'to turn around', 'transform'. With these different connotations the use of the word here is hardly accidental. Although Nineveh was not overturned, as in being destroyed, it did experience a turn around. The Lord was faithful in the call that He made to Nineveh that they were turned. The hand of the Lord's judgement was stayed because of the turning around of the hearts of the people of Nineveh.

The same thing can be said of the Lord in staying His hand of wrath from destroying you. The same grace that brought you unto repentance is the very same grace that holds the transformative power to change nations, to redirect their paths towards righteousness and redemption. This ought to encourage you and embolden you to go out and proclaim this call to repentance, because you have already experienced the effects of it in your own life. Pastor Gordon Keddie wisely says, "Nineveh calls us to the foot of the cross and asks, 'What will you do with Jesus?' Nineveh points all men and women everywhere to the profound necessity of coming to the Lord in repentance and faith." These questions ought to echo within your own hearts and lives. What will you do with Jesus?

What will America do with Jesus? What will the world do with Jesus? The same grace that has been extended to you, that has led you to genuine repentance and a relationship with Jehovah, is extended to the entirety of this world as well. This, my friends, is the grace of national repentance, a profound and unmerited gift from a loving and merciful God. In a world filled with turmoil and strife, sin and misery, the call to repentance stands as a beacon of hope. Just as Nineveh heeded the call and found redemption, nations today too can be transformed by the boundless grace of God. Your own repentance serves as a testament to the life-changing potential of this divine grace, and ought to inspire you to share this message far and wide. So take to heart the lessons from Nineveh, let them ignite your passion for spreading the message of repentance, and remember that the grace which has touched your life has the power to touch and transform the world. This is the grace that redeems, the grace that reconciles, the grace that renews. Embrace it, share it, and be an instrument proclaiming the grace of God in a world in need of salvation, for there is a mighty grace in national repentance.

So brothers and sisters, as you live in the world so full of evil and darkness, wickedness and sin, remember that you were called out of darkness and into the marvelous light of Christ Jesus. And if it can happen to you, why not your nation? Psalm 2 says the duty of nations is to kiss the Son. “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” Our Lord Jesus Christ used this example of the sign of Jonah and the call to Nineveh to repentance as a means to call the nations unto repentance. Matthew 12:41, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.” Let us follow Christ’s example in using the example of Nineveh in judgement of this nation, because the people of Nineveh repented at the words of Jonah, but we have the greater than Jonah. We have what Jonah pointed to, Christ, the King of all nations, and that is what we proclaim. And if we call this nation to

repentance through the power of Christ Jesus as the King over this nation and they reject it, then even Nineveh will rise up in judgement against them. Brothers and sisters, fulfill your duty in calling nations unto repentance.