

## "NAHUM, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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**Text for Sermon: Nahum 1:1-3, 7-8, 15; 3:8-10, 18-19**

### **Introduction.**

Jonah and Nahum. Two books, two prophecies, two revelations of the full character of God, His goodness and His severity, the oceanic breadth of His mercy and the volcanic heat of His judgment.

We cheer the salvation of a city in Jonah only to shudder at the annihilation of the same city a century and a half later in Nahum.

Nahum did not write this book as a warning or "call to repentance" for the people of Nineveh. *Nahum means comfort*. How is God's judgment on Assyria and Nineveh a comfort? Nahum was telling the people of Judah to not despair because God had pronounced judgment and the Assyrians would soon be getting just what they deserved.

God is just and faithful to His promises and this means relief and joy to those living in fear of enemies. Nineveh's destruction is linked to the character and nature of God. Evil doers of every age face the same fate.

Two themes, the destruction of God's enemies and the salvation of God's people. This is how the kingdom of God will be realized. Without the defeat of His enemies there is no real peace.

### **Nahum of Elkosh.**

When we turn to the prophecy of Nahum, we find ourselves reading words written down by another relatively unknown, small town prophet, like Micah. What is important is not the prophet but the prophecy, not the messenger but the message, he must decrease, God must increase

All we want is the words of a man who heard directly the voice of the Lord and who spoke for God the very Words of God. We want know the words of this man who heard God and had the power and authority of God to declare the things of God.

The first thing we have to acknowledge if we are going to be totally honest is that Nahum is pretty rough reading. You don't hear many sermons from the book of Nahum. You certainly don't see many verses from Nahum cross-stitched and hanging in people's homes.

I checked my Lectionary which is the three-year schedule of Scripture readings used in more liturgical churches and discovered that Nahum is one of a few books completely left out.

Nothing to see here folks, move along. Nothing really worth reading here, just skip on to Habakkuk. But let's be brave and see what this portion of God's holy and inspired Word says.

### **An oracle concerning Nineveh, capital of Assyria.**

We know God called Nahum to prophecy against Nineveh. But didn't Jonah already prophecy against Nineveh and didn't Nineveh repent and God spared them? Yes, but that was a hundred fifty years ago, and as happens with revivals of religion, it didn't last.

Since then Nineveh and the nation of Assyria had gotten back to their old ways only worse.

In my sermon on Jonah I said Assyria was a ruthless, bloodthirsty, empire that systematically beat into submission every nation around them. They were a violent, barbaric people. They skinned people alive and piled human heads in pyramids. Their crimes against humanity were every bit as horrible as Hitler, Stalin and Hussein.

In the eighth century BC Assyria was the largest and most power empire in the world, and the sworn enemy of Israel. The last verse of Nahum tells us that Nineveh's unceasing evil touched every nation.

In 722BC Nineveh had attacked and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and scattered the ten tribes of Israel all over the Middle East, never to be fully restored.

Nahum's prophecy was a daring, bold and hard to believe prophecy. Who would ever have believed Nahum? It would be like saying someday soon the United States will fall to Mexico. The empire of Assyria had ruled over the Middle East for 250 years.

Numerous commentators point out Nahum's courage to give such a bold message when Nineveh was at the height of her power and Judah was so small and weak.

Nineveh was a city without rival, it couldn't be defeated. Who could even begin to imagine that a powerful empire as rich and far-reaching and unstoppable as the Assyrian empire could ever fall? Who could ever believe it would one day be rubble?

Who in the 1980's would have ever believed the Berlin Wall would fall? But Nahum had a Berlin Wall story to back up his daring prophecy.

**Nahum 3:8-10** Are you better than Thebes that sat by the Nile, with water around her, her rampart a sea, and water her wall?

[9] Cush was her strength; Egypt too, and that without limit;

Put and the Libyans were her helpers.

[10] Yet she became an exile; she went into captivity.

If Thebes the great fortified capital city of Egypt on the Nile River could fall to Assyria, why could Assyria not fall as well?

The day of grace has run out and the night of judgment is about to fall. Those who trust in horses and chariots and walls and allies will fall. In 612BC the nation of Babylon rose up against Nineveh. The city was so destroyed and laid to waste it was a 1,000 years before anyone found its location.

God is exceeding patient and long suffering. He gives every country time to repent of sin and follow Him as Lord. But He is not mocked, there are limits to His divine forbearance and He has warned us of a coming day of judgment.

***The day of God's grace has a sunset and when night falls so does His judgment.***

We are presently living in the day of Jonah, but the day of Nahum is coming. What could make God so angry at a nation of people that He created in His image?

Wicked idolatry and brutal inhumanity. Worshipping other gods leads to evil practices. Idolatry always robs God of His glory and man of his value and worth. Idolatry devalues humanity, and leads to inhumanity.

When we turn things into gods, people become things. As things become more important than people, things are treated better than people.

Worship money and it turns to materialism, greed, coveting, willingness to lie, cheat or steal.

Worship power and it turns to abuse against others.

Worship sex and it turns to immorality and abuse and using others.

Worship choice, convenience and selfish desires, children become things that can be disposed of.

Worship the earth, creatures become gods, and people become dispensable.

Idolatry is putting something else in place of God. But all other gods make terrible gods.

When a nation follows an idol, her wars become holy wars.

Nazi Germany worshipped racial superiority and tried to make Europe bow to her god.

Japan worshipped the Sun-god and tried to make the Pacific nations bow to her god.

Arab nations worship Allah and wage holy war to make all bow to Allah.

America worships materialism and sex, so our battles are holy wars to protect our way of life and our standard of living, and our carnal desires.

A nation built on idolatry and inhumanity will not stand. Her judgment is deserved and inescapable.

**Proverbs 14:34** Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

Assyria considered herself the king of beasts, the king of the jungle (2:10-13). The rest of the world was her prey, to be consumed and devoured by her. But the lion of Assyria is no match for the lion of Judah, the king of Kings.

Who would ever believe the forces of evil in our world will one day be wiped out?

Who would ever believe Satan's vast empire will one day be reduced to rubble and cast forever into hell?

Who would ever believe one day the final enemy death will be destroyed by one stronger than death?

The gates of hell will not prevail, they will not succeed, they will never overcome the church of Jesus Christ. It does not matter how bad things look or get, the stronger man has come into our world.

**The good news of the Gospel of Nahum.**

*Nahum's Gospel news is that God's enemies will be defeated.*

**Nahum 1:2** The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.

In the defeat of Nineveh is a picture of the defeat of Satan by the power of the cross. The cross is the most decisive defeat of the greatest powers standing against God. The cross is the public display of the defeat of Satan and all his legions.

**Colossians 2:15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

The destruction of Nineveh is a foretaste of the defeat of all wickedness. All powers that oppose God and His righteousness and authority will be brought to shame and defeat. None can stand.

*Nahum's Gospel news is that God will bring salvation.*

**Nahum 1:15** Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off.

Apart from Christ our fate would be the same as Nineveh, but salvation belongs to the Lord. He is good to those who wait on Him. Surely His goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives.

*Nahum's Gospel news is God is our refuge and strength.*

**Nahum 1:7** The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.

In Nahum we see Christ as our stronghold in the day of trouble (1:7).

When Christ returns in glory He will destroy all opposing powers and hand over the Kingdom to His Father "so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

**Psalms 18:1-2** I love you, O Lord, my strength.

[2] The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

For those feeling attacked, beset by evil or trouble, God is a sure defense, a secure fortress.

The Lord knows those who take refuge in Him. He has known us from before the foundations of the earth. He knows our origin and our destiny.

## **Application and conclusion.**

History doesn't just happen; it is God's story. God started it in the beginning, God is directing it every step toward the ending He has planned, all according to His will and power, and in accordance with His character as a covenant making, covenant keeping redeeming God. All history is salvation history. There are only two paths for nations and people, obedience and disobedience, repentance or rebellion, eternal salvation or eternal judgment.

Sin is serious. Nahum calls us to self-examination and warns against the sin of believing that life can be lived apart from the will and ways of God.

God's glory is seen in His judgment, it is worthy of praise. God's excellencies are proclaimed in judgment (Nah. 1:2–7). An oracle of judgment is a means of grace if the hearers repent.

Judgment is not the Lord's final word. His acts of retribution are also acts of redemptive grace for those who repent and turn to the truth of the Gospel. Hope from judgment is found only in the judgment Christ bore on the cross for all who believe.

You should know about the judgment you have been saved and delivered from so you might know how great is the salvation given to you, how great is the love shown you and how great is the reward that awaits you. All of this is cause for worship.

Without a deep appreciation of sin we don't appreciate salvation.

Without a deep appreciation of judgment we don't appreciate our justification.

Who needs salvation if there is nothing to be saved from?

Why do I need a Savior if my sin isn't bad enough to hurt me?

Books like Nahum remind us of what we once were and what would happen to us if we stayed in that condition and where we would go as a result.

All of this is cause for sharing the good news with others. What can you and I do to turn more of God's enemies into God's friends.

**Romans 10:15** As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"