

God's Patientce & Perplexing People

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[0 : 00] And turn in your Bibles to Nahum chapter 1. That will be our scripture reading for tonight. Nahum chapter 1. So we're in the Old Testament, in the minor prophets near the end of the Old Testament.

Jonah, Micah, Nahum. And we'll read chapter 1 in its entirety.

An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkishite. The Lord is a jealous and avenging God.

The Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power.

The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is the whirlwind and the storm and clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up.

[1 : 06] He makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away.

The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire.

The rocks are shattered before him. The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him. But with an overwhelming flood, he will make an end of Nineveh.

He will pursue his foes into darkness. Whatever they plot against the Lord, he will bring to an end. Trouble will not come a second time. They will be entangled among the thorns and drunk from their wine.

They will be consumed like dry stubble. From you, O Nineveh, has one come forth who plots evil against the Lord and counsels wickedness. This is what the Lord says.

[2 : 09] Although they have allies and are numerous, they will be cut off and pass away. Although I have afflicted you, O Judah, I will afflict you no more.

Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear away your shackles. The Lord has given a command concerning you, Nineveh. You will have no descendants to bear your name.

I will destroy the carved images and cast idols that are in the temple of your gods. I will prepare your grave, for you are vile. Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news and proclaims peace.

Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you. They will be completely destroyed. Let's hear God's word preached.

I think it's fair to say that we all have one or two pretty difficult people in our lives.

[3 : 17] And I mean difficult in the widest sense. Maybe it is sin, unrepentant, unresolved sin in their lives.

Or maybe it's just personality differences. Where you don't seem to be on the same page as that person. You don't really get them.

Maybe it's something else. And I guess no matter how you slice it, whatever the reason may be, they're difficult for you. And I'm not saying that you don't like them or that you wish they were gone.

Rather, I'm saying the exact opposite. It's because you are committed to them. You love them. And that's why it's so hard. You don't want them to disappear.

Your heart's bound to them. And yet, for whatever reason, they're difficult for you. And like I said, I think it's accurate to say that we probably all have one or two people in our lives.

[4 : 21] And you're probably thinking of one. It's difficult. They don't make your life easier. They instead make it hard. And that's the trouble.

That's the trouble that we want to talk about tonight. We're going through a series on God's attributes and our problems. And that's the problem, the difficulty, the trouble that we want to look at this evening.

And so we want to go with our troubles to the Lord and say and see, okay, Lord, this is who you are and who he is and what he is.

How does that help us? And so tonight, we want to talk about God's patience and perplexing people. God's patience and perplexing people.

Patience is what we need, isn't it? With those hard, difficult, to live with people. But we don't want to begin with our own patience.

[5 : 28] I mean, it's easy enough to recognize that, yes, I need patience. But just recognizing that is not enough. We want to begin with God's patience and then we want to go to our patience.

And so we're going to begin and we're going to spend most of tonight talking about God's patience. And I hope, perhaps Lord willing, next week to spend the majority of the time on our patience.

But tonight, we're going to spend the majority of our time on God's patience. And we want to begin by asking, well, what is God's patience? What is it? What is it?

Well, you have Nahum chapter 1 open before you. And the reason I had it read is right in the middle of all of that wrath, there was one phrase that shows us what God's patience is.

Nahum chapter 1, and it says in verse 3, the Lord is slow to anger and great in power. The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished.

[6 : 27] Now, Nahum is quoting what the Lord said to Moses. Remember when the Lord hid Moses in the rock and the Lord went before him proclaiming his name.

And the Lord's slow to anger, abounding in love, etc. It's quoted many times in the Old Testament. And Nahum 1 here is one of those places.

So what is God's patience? Well, it's his slowness to anger. It's his slowness to anger. It's not his absence of anger. You can see that right on the surface of Nahum chapter 1.

God's patience is not go easy or ignore sin or belittle sin or it's not a very big deal to me. It's not a shrugging off of sin. You see how Nahum chapter 1 verse 2 begins.

Now, this is chapter 1 verse 2. This is the very first thing that Nahum has to say to Nineveh. And it's the Lord is a jealous and avenging God.

[7 : 31] Sin is a personal attack on God. That's why it talks about God as an avenging God.

Because sin is done against him. It's an attack against him. We can talk about sin being against God's law. And it definitely is.

Sin is lawlessness. And generally in those contexts, the idea of justice is brought up. The breaking of God's law and the justice of God. Those are kind of, they go together.

And so when God deals with the breaking of his law, he comes as the righteous judge to condemn sin. But what is interesting here is the terms that Nahum is using are not justice and law terms.

Those are applicable. They're rather really personal. He's talking about wrath, jealousy, vengeance. Jealousy and vengeance are personal feelings.

[8 : 39] They're personal reactions to something. God takes your sin, my sin, every sin, personally. He says that those who sin are his foes.

The end of verse 2, the Lord takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. So those who sin, God says, you are my foe.

You are my enemy. He's taking it personally. Because ultimately when we sin, we are wishing and we are acting like God didn't exist. We're really saying, God, this would be a much better universe if you weren't here.

That's what sin is. It's a personal attack on him. And God's internal reaction to that sin is wrath. It's anger. It's vengeance. It's jealousy.

And so God is not the set of laws. He's not an abstract principle. If you file your taxes wrong, and maybe that's the season that we're in, I'm always extremely nervous when I'm doing my taxes.

[9 : 50] I'm just, I'm afraid I'm going to get on the bad side of the IRS. But no one at the IRS takes it personally. They don't. If you file your taxes incorrectly, I mean, even if you're doing it illegally, they don't even take it personally then.

They send you some sort of form letter that says, according to law 16-28.6B or whatever, you need to pay more. This isn't right.

There's no anger there. It's not personal. Most of the time, there's probably not even a person on the other end. You've just been run through a computer.

Well, God is a person, and sin is a personal attack on him. What Nineveh was doing to Judah and Israel, God was taking as a personal attack against him.

Now, so you see, God's patience is not his lack of anger. Some people are just easygoing. That's not what we see here.

[11 : 00] That's right on the face of the text. And God's patience is not his lack of power. God's patience is not his, well, I can't do much about it.

There's nothing I can do, and so I just have to grin and bear it. You know, sometimes you might, maybe you've seen a two-year-old, and they're getting angry, and they're all hot and piping, mad about something, and you can't help but laughing at them because the thing that they're mad at, the thing that they feel so offended at, is something that they can't do anything about, and their anger, as overwhelming as it is for them, is, it's a small thing.

It's a helpless thing. And so there they are huffing and puffing, and they can't do anything about it. It's sort of like Psalm 2, where the nations rage, and the peoples conspire in vain, and yet the Lord scoffs at them.

And that's, there's nothing they can do about the thing that they're so angry about. And sometimes, that's the way it is. We have to learn, even in the best sense, we have to learn to suffer, and to be, just to put up with things.

And we are called to suffer. We are called into situations, and to experience things, where God will teach you patience, where there's nothing you can do to make it better, and you learn patience.

[12 : 22] Well, is that His patience? Where God is sort of stuck in a situation? Well, no. It says, no, God is great in power.

There is no lack of power to get rid of the things that are trying His patience. I mean, with a word, He can snap and make whatever is bothering Him and His patience disappear.

And so, what is God's patience? It's His slowness. The slowness to anger. The anger will explode.

That's really the only sort of word that can kind of wrap its arms around all of Nahum chapter 1. The anger will explode.

The fury, the vengeance, the wrath. And it says it will explode in a whirlwind of destruction and storm. Verse 3, His way is in the whirlwind and the storm and the clouds are the dust of His feet.

[13 : 31] And so, when God's anger breaks, it's like the breaking of a tornado. So, think of a tornado going through a house.

There's no stopping it. There's no controlling it. Or, it's the furious heat of the sun in the desert, bashing and caramel wither and blossom as the blossom of Lebanon fade.

Or, it describes it as an earthquake, mountains shaking and hills melting. So, you've seen earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes.

That is the picture, that's the imagery that the Lord is saying. When my anger breaks out, this is what it's going to be like.

It's His anger breaking out. And you can read Revelation, it's the breaking out of His anger. But the question is, what is holding it back now?

[14 : 39] What is holding it back now? What held it back in your life for the years of your sin and rebellion?

What's holding it back even right now from destroying maybe some of your loved ones? Destroying the whole world? What is holding it back?

Well, not us. Certainly not us. It's Him. God's patience is not a lack of power completely on the opposite end.

On the contrary, it's God's power over Himself. It's His power over Himself. Numbers chapter 14. A very interesting phrase.

So, remember, the people have already sent in the spies, they've come back, the spies are saying, no, we can't go in, the people all rebel, and God is angry with them, and Moses intercedes, and listen to how he intercedes.

[15 : 51] This is from Numbers 14. Moses prayed, now may the Lord's strength be displayed. So, how is the Lord's strength going to be displayed? In this context.

Now, may the Lord's strength be displayed just as you declared, the Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love. Moses says, show how great your strength is in the slowness of your anger.

So, what is God's patience? It's holding back that breaking out. We're going to talk, Lord willing, in later sermons about God's wrath, because that too is much of an attribute that is for our good, and to help us in our problems, as any of God's attributes, but right now, what is holding back that wrath?

That's like an earthquake, that's like a tornado, that's like a flood. Well, it's God himself. Proverbs 16, 32, better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper, than one who takes a city.

Who is stronger? The warrior? Conquering cities? Or the patient man? Well, a patient man, Proverbs says, a patient man is stronger than Caesar.

[17 : 19] He's stronger than Alexander the Great. They took cities. They demolished cities. They conquered kingdoms, but they couldn't conquer themselves.

But God is not like that. God is the master of himself. That's what you see in patience. Never does his anger get the better of him. Never does his anger break out in sinful, reckless, destructive, at least self-destructive ways.

He never has to say, I was too angry. He never has to say, you know, that wasn't the right time. That wasn't the right way. I should have channeled my anger in a different way.

Or he never has to say, you know, on second thought, I might have had the right to be angry, but the timing and the control were completely wrong. And so what is his patience?

Well, it's his ability to harness and to hold back his wrath. It's a power over himself. So that's our first point.

[18 : 29] What is it? It's God's very own power over himself. Now, let's keep going, and here's the second point. I want to think about the greatness of his patience. The greatness of his patience.

patience. And as we do, I think it is right for us, it is right for us to stand back and be amazed and to worship our God because we have been the recipients of this patience.

This is something that God has shown to us. And so I want you to think with me, and we want to worship together his patience. Now, how great is it? Well, his patience shows more power than even creating the heavens and the earth does.

What did he show power over in creation? Well, he showed his power, I mean, when he divided skies and seas and he made animals and he called the plants out of the ground.

And what did he show power over? Well, he showed power over matter and creation. But in his patience, he shows power over himself. And he is greater than creation, far exalted, far greater, far more magnificent, far more amazing than creation.

[19 : 56] And so his patience doesn't control dirt and dust and light and water. As amazing as all of that display of his power is.

But his patience holds back his righteousness and his anger and his vengeance. His patience controls and directs all of his infinite being.

And so his patience right now is an even greater power than what we will see in the destruction and the end of the world.

Again, in one way right now, God is showing more power and holding back his anger than he will show when he pours it out and ruins and destroys the world of sin.

when he rolls up the skies and he burns the earth with fire and when he overthrows nations and when he takes death and Hades and throws them into the lake of fire when he pushes Satan into that great lake of fire and when kings grovel at his feet and all of that rage that we read about in Psalm 2 is just silenced with a look.

[21 : 23] There'll be great power but again that power is power over creation. It's his power and his dominion over creatures but God's patience is his power and dominion over himself.

He controls himself. And so I want you to think right now what right at this moment what power is being displayed.

God is modulating, controlling, softening his wrath, holding it back, even softening the blow for a time to give a chance for repentance.

And wisdom is saying wait. And mercy patience is saying hold on. and grace patience is now saying to us repent.

Now is the time to repent. And so that's one way we see the greatness of God's patience. What is he showing power over? Now here's another way of seeing the greatness of his patience.

[22 : 42] Think about all that right now is provoking it. Think of all that right now is provoking his patience and his anger and his righteous justice.

There's blasphemy, there's belittling, there's ignoring, there's neglect, there's all these ongoing sins of men.

Think about what is provoking, think about what God's eyes see. In Norse mythology, Odin was all father and he saw all that was going on in the whole, all the world, in all the nine realms.

Well, our God is not some Scandinavian myth, he is the real all father and he really does see all that goes on in the earth. And I want you to put yourself on that throne for a second or a minute or an hour.

And if you were on the throne and you saw what he sees, how long would the sinful earth last? Samuel Bolton, the Puritan pastor, wrote, if any tender-hearted man should sit an hour in the throne of the Almighty and look down upon the earth as God does continually.

[24 : 15] So this isn't just like an ordinary guy. This is a tender-hearted man. This is a compassionate, merciful, kind, patient, gentle man. Now, let's suppose that that kind of person, he were to sit on the throne of God and see what God sees for just one hour and looked at what abominations are done in that hour.

he would undoubtedly in the next, in the next hour, set all the world on fire. The world wouldn't last probably ten seconds if I was on the throne.

So how long would it go on if you were on the throne? how long would it go on if you were on the throne? There's been hundreds and now thousands of years of provocation.

And that's the greatness of God's patience, the passing centuries, and the sheer amount of in-your-face wickedness, the lies, and the stealing, and the assaults, and the rapes, and the murders, and the things, the terrible things done in secret.

The evils of the dark web unseen by all others, but seen by God, and yet his patience is holding his anger back.

[25 : 51] That's the greatness of God's patience. patience. That's the patience of what God is doing right now. And it is right for us to stand back and be amazed at our God.

Well, let's keep going. That's the second point, the greatness of his patience. Now, the third point, let's just think for a moment about the glory of it. And what I mean is the beauty of it, the amazing beauty of it, the glory of it.

God's patience is like the glory of a shooting star. So you've been outside in the dark and you see a shooting star. And that is more amazing to you than all the other stars in the sky just for that moment, isn't it?

It's so beautiful and it's so brief and yet it's brevity, it's shortness, it's there, it's part of its beauty, it's magic, it's glory.

It's a momentary thing, a momentary glory. It's here and then it's gone. Maybe a football analogy is more your taste.

[27 : 01] You can think of the career of Bo Jackson. Maybe I'm dating myself here. Young men, if you want to go look up something amazing, go YouTube Bo Jackson highlights.

It was so brief and yet its brevity was part of the magic of it now. one year, Bo Jackson started in the baseball all-star game and the football pro ball the same year.

The best in baseball, the best in football in the same year. I mean, he broke baseball bats over his head. He ran up walls. He ran over linebackers.

He was a man among boys. And it was just for a few years, though. He injured his hip. That was it. It was all over.

And people were just left with the what if, if only, what could have been. It was brief and it was brilliant.

[28 : 05] And that was, and that's God's patience. In eternity past, God's patience had no exercise.

God's patience, there was no reason for God to be patient. God didn't need any patience to live within the Trinity, completely happy. And in eternity future, patience again will have no exercise.

There'll be no reason for it. This is a very peculiar thing because alone, of all of God's attributes, it only has now. It only has now.

It just has this dot between eternities. So in eternity future, God's mercy and his grace and his kindness are going to be forever on display to his people in heaven.

They have grace, mercy, kindness, love. It has heaven, eternal heaven to display their glories and God's justice and his wrath and his righteousness, his sternness.

[29 : 11] they have hell to display their glories forever and ever. God's patience just has now. Just has now.

Now is the time of God's patience. Now is the time of God's favor. Now it's on full display. Now it's an operation. And so now we see the greatness and the glory of his patience.

And so like a shooting star, it's going to be soon over. God won't need patience in heaven. And he won't show patience in hell.

But now is the day of salvation. So I want you to think about how momentary and how glorious and beautiful this virtue is right at this moment.

Because now patience is saying, repent. Now it's saying, be saved. You don't have to be lost forever. You don't have to go to hell.

[30 : 16] You can be saved. And patience is saying, now, now, and anger and wrath and justice are wanting to storm in and destroy you. And patience is saying, hold on. Wait.

But repent. Repent. Repent. That's the glory of his patience. It gives room. It gives space.

There's time now to be saved. And aren't you glad, brother and sister, aren't you glad that God is patient? Because I didn't get it the first time. I heard the gospel a lot of times.

And I did a lot of sinning in the face of God. And if there was no patience, or if God's patience was like my patience, I probably would be lost. lost.

It's a limited grace. And it's more precious because it is so rare. It is so limited.

[31 : 14] And so don't miss it. And don't abuse it. Instead, use it. Now God's patience is holding out a hand of mercy.

mercy. So come to Christ. And just think of the terms as you come, think of the terms that God is using here in Nahum 1 about you're my foe.

You're my enemy. And yet he's holding out mercy to his foes and his enemies. And that tells us how we need to repent too. Because you have to admit that you've been God's enemy.

You've been acting as his foe. You've been his foe. And God has every right to be angry with you. And that's how you come repenting. You say, I've been the enemy. But now I'm confessing my sin.

And if you confess it, you'll be forgiven. 1 John 1 9. So that's God's patience. That's God's patience. That's what it is.

[32 : 20] That's its greatness. That's something of its glory. And now let's talk about those perplexing people. Let's talk about those perplexing people. I hope that as we've talked, this brings clarity for what you and I need.

Because we need that kind of patience. We need this kind of patience. Because, and this shows us what kind of patience we need.

This shows us what we need. self-control. in some ways, aren't we the perplexing people in God's life, so to speak. The difficult people.

The people he loves and is committed to. But if we're honest, we have to admit that sometimes we don't make it easy. And yet God is patient with us.

And so I hope this shows you what we need. We need this kind of self-control. This kind of patience. And so what does God's patience say to us as we deal with perplexing people?

[33 : 24] Well, it says two things. The first is we should be growing in patience. We should be growing in patience. Should.

It's an ought to word. We ought to do this. God's patience convicted. me, doesn't it? Doesn't it convict you? What right do we have to be so impatient when God has been so patient with us?

What right do we have to go around choking and choking our neighbors, going around, holding things against them, so impatient when God has forgiven us so much debt, when he's been so patient with us, when he is currently right now being so patient with us?

What right do we have? See, impatience is not just a personality problem. It's really an ugly and ungrateful sin.

Because every day we're drinking in God's patience. And then to be so unaware, fair, and to just turn around and be so impatient with those people that are so difficult for us.

[34 : 48] So again, I ask myself, how dare you be so impatient, so fed up, so quick tempered with those hard people in your life, when God's been so patient with you.

James says we should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. What God has, we need to have too, we should have.

Yes, those people can be hard, but God has been patient with you. He's been slow to anger with you. And so you ought to be, you should be slow to anger with them.

And then here's the second thing, what does God's patience say to us as we deal with those perplexing people. Not only should we grow in patience, we can.

We can grow in patience. I think every virtue is like this, but it seems like patience might be especially like this, that, yeah, you know you ought to, but how do you, how do you, how can you?

[36 : 06] It seems so out of our control, so slippery of an idea, but the fact is that God's patience teaches us that we can be patient ourselves.

It does more than say you ought to, it says you can. And the reason is it can is because brothers and sisters, the God of patience is at work in my heart.

the spirit of the patient God is at work in my heart and where he works, where he is tending the garden of my heart, I will produce the fruit of patience, love, joy, peace, patience.

The spirit can produce patience in you. We're going to talk about how he does that, but I just want you to see that this attribute of God is not like God's eternity or God being a trinity.

Those are what we call incommunicable. God can't give them to us. They're ungiveable, uncommunicable. He can't give them to us kind of attributes because God alone has them.

[37 : 31] But this is not one of those kind of attributes. God can give you patience and he will give you patience. And that's what also is amazing because God is going to be working in us to make us more like him until finally we are perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

That is where we are going. That is what God is doing. That is what the spirit can do. That is what the spirit is doing. And so you do have the God of patience to help you.

And so I want you to think of this. God has been so patient with me. This is what God's patience is like. This is its greatness. This is its glory. And all the rest that we talked about.

And I want you to realize that that God is at work in you. Those qualities are what he is working in you.

It is not a losing battle. This is a winning fight. The God of patience is standing at your side. And so when your heart is roaring with anger and you're ready to break out and you're about to be overthrown, the name of the Lord is a refuge.

[38 : 44] The righteous run to it and are safe. When your temper is ready to take over your city, you need to go and run to the Lord and find refuge.

So brothers and sisters, we should be patient. It's the right thing to do. It's wrong for us to be so impatient with people. And brothers and sisters, we can.

We can grow in this grace. We will grow in this grace. And so if this is one of your besetting sins, then come with me to Jesus and say, Jesus, I need this patience.

I need your spirit at work in me, and so break my heart. Mold my heart. I can be this reckless, hot person. Make me like you.

And it's a prayer that God will answer. You know, there are some prayers that God says, I will answer. There's some we don't have any promises for, and so we ask.

[39 : 51] But there are some prayers that God has attached promises to. And being like him is something he's promised.

And so when we pray, he will answer this. We're going to talk about how he does that next week, Lord willing. It might be in the fire.

It's probably not going to be easy. It's going to be humbling. But it is a prayer that he will answer. And so that just as God is slow to anger, you know what, one day you too are going to be slow to anger.

Let's pray. God, it is truly amazing how patient you have been with us in the face of all of our sin.

So we thank you. And we adore you for this hand of patience that holds back your full wrath, that softens the blow, that disciplines and gives time, that doesn't totally destroy right away, but still gives more time.

[41 : 17] Thank you that you're so full of love that you send warning shots off of our bow, and sometimes even after we've missed two or three or four or five, you send another salvo and we were brought up short again, and so we thank you for your patience.

We would ask, Holy Spirit, make us to be patient people. Sweeten us, soften us with your grace, humble us with your grace and your love, break our hearts, give us that supernatural control.

We know that we can get so hot and so angry and so explosive all so suddenly. So please help us to have that control of ourselves.

Please teach us to be patient, kind and compassionate people toward each other in the family of God, and especially towards those one or two really difficult people in our lives that we probably all have.

love. Please sweeten our hearts and make us more like you, I pray. Amen. We'll take your hymnals, your Trinity hymnals, and turn to number 10.

[42 : 40] And number 10 is Psalm 103, put to words. verse 10. Psalm 103 is another one of those places where the Lord says, I'm slow to anger.

We hear that quote again. So number 10 in your Trinity hymnals, let's stand as we sing. Yes, Thank you.