

The Beauty of God's Judgement

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[0 : 00] Nahum chapter 3 is our text for tonight. Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk.! Blashing swords and glittering spears, many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses.

All because of the wanton lust of a harlot, alluring the mistress of sorceries who enslaved nations by her prostitution and people by her witchcraft.

I'm against you, declares the Lord Almighty. I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame.

I will pelt you with filth. I will treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. All who see you will flee from you and say, Nineveh is in ruins.

Who will mourn for her? Where can I find anyone to comfort you? Are you better than Thebes, situated on the Nile, with water around her?

[1 : 30] The river was her defense, the waters her wall. Cush and Egypt were her boundless strength. Put and Libya were among her allies.

Yet she was taken captive and went into exile. Her infants were dashed to pieces at the head of every street. Lots were cast for her nobles.

And all her great men were put in chains. You, too, will become drunk. You will go into hiding and seek refuge from the enemy.

All your fortresses are like fig trees with their first ripe fruit. When they are shaken, the figs fall into the mouth of the eater. Look at your troops.

They're all women. The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies. Fire has consumed their bars. Draw water for the siege.

[2 : 25] Strengthen your defenses. Work the clay. Tread the mortar. Repair the brickwork. There the fire will devour you. The sword will cut you down and like grasshoppers consume you.

Multiply like grasshoppers. Multiply like locusts. You have increased the number of your merchants till they are more than the stars of the sky. But like locusts, they strip the land and then fly away.

Your guards are like locusts. Your officials like swarms of locusts that settle in the walls on a cold day. But when the sun appears, they fly away and no one knows where.

O king of Assyria, your shepherds slumber. Your nobles lie down to rest. Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them.

Nothing can heal your wound. Your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall.

[3 : 28] For who has not felt your endless cruelty? For those of you who have been visiting on these Sunday evenings, we've been looking at the attributes of God and our problems.

And what we've been seeing in the Bible is that we find out and we learn about what our God is like, not in the abstract, not in some sort of theological book, but very much in our experiences and our problems.

And we're learning, I hope, to bring what we are and our problems to who God is. We want to learn to wait upon the Lord and look to him.

And so that's what we've been talking about. Now, this evening, I want to start with a question for you to think about. And it's this question. Do you think of God as beautiful?

Do you think of God as beautiful? Well, not in appearance, of course, because God doesn't have a body like men. He has no physical appearance. But do you think of him as beautiful?

[4 : 45] You know, a woman right after she's delivered a baby doesn't generally look physically beautiful. And yet to her husband, there's probably very few times where she doesn't look more beautiful.

It's that inward beauty that Peter wrote about, that unfading beauty of character. And that's my question.

Are you beginning to learn? Are you beginning to see that your God is beautiful, stunning, stunning, magnificent?

Are you experiencing that love affair that the Bible talks about? Because the Bible is full of that love affair. Listen to what it says.

One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

[5 : 41] God is beautiful. Now, that's what I hope you're seeing as we go through this series on God's attributes and man's troubles. I hope you're seeing this and feeling that our God is beautiful.

Beautiful in character. And as we've been singing, like we sang yesterday, our last afternoon, last Sunday afternoon. And I hope that you've been seeing and feeling more of this beauty.

We pray in Psalm 86:11, give me an undivided heart. I want a whole heart. All for you, God. And what is an undivided heart?

Well, it's a heart that is entranced with God's beauty. That we don't just know about what he's like. We're appreciating it. And we're seeing it as good and attractive and beautiful, as magnificent and perfect. Well, why begin there tonight?

[6 : 46] Why begin with the beauty of the Lord? Because this evening we're going to talk about God's wrath. So if you're visiting, you've missed a lot of other things.

But tonight we come to God's wrath. And we're looking at God's wrath. And the problem that we're looking at, the human problem, is how do you live with evil in high places?

So that's the attribute, God's wrath. And here's the problem. There is evil in high places. And so I wanted to start with this because I want us to be able to say and to feel and to know that even God's wrath is beautiful.

Even God's wrath is beautiful. Now, God's wrath is many things. It's overpowering. Psalm 76, 7 says, who can stand before your anger?

So when someone experiences God's anger, it is overpowering. It bears them down. We read in Nahum. In chapter 1, we read this several weeks ago.

[7 : 53] What is God's wrath like? It's like a tornado. It's like a hurricane. It's like a whirlwind. It's like an earthquake that makes the mountains melt. And it says there, who can withstand his indignation?

Who can endure his fierce anger? So God's wrath, it's overpowering. There's no fortress. There's no legs. There's no heart strong enough that can withstand when God comes in anger.

So what is it like? What is hell like? What does it feel like to be under God's wrath for that to fall upon you? Well, it's like that on December 27th, 2004, when that earthquake in the Indian Ocean happened, and that huge tsunami swept away hundreds of thousands of people.

200,000 people died in moments. Swept away. What is it like to experience God's wrath?

Well, you can't get your feet under you. You can't stop it. You can't put up any sort of defense.

You're just swept away. Nahum says, with an overwhelming flood, he will make an end to Nineveh.

[9 : 13] God's wrath is overpowering. It's terrifying. Terrifying. To come close to God's wrath is to be afraid. We read this morning, Psalm 90, we are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.

Jesus said, don't be afraid of men. Remember that? What he said? Don't be afraid of men who can merely kill your body. But be afraid of the one who can, after he's killed your body, he can throw your soul, both body and soul, into hell.

Jesus says, yes, fear him. Fear him. Fear him. So God's wrath, it brings terror. It brings pain. The rich man.

Pastor John alluded to this. The rich man also died and he was buried in hell where he was in torment. He looked up and he said, Father Abraham, he saw Abraham far away and Lazarus by his side.

And so you have the picture. Abraham is far away. So he's small. And he sees Lazarus by Abraham's side.

[10 : 26] And the rich man says, Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and to cool my tongue. Because I am in agony in this fire.

God's wrath is overpowering. It's terrifying. It brings pain. It brings destruction.

Destruction. You know what it is to build something. To build a structure. Destruction is the opposite of that.

It's to unbuild. God's wrath is the eternal reversal of his creation. In creation, he builds a person together in his mother's womb.

He weaves and builds the bones. And. Wrath is the opposite of that. Isaiah cried, I'm undone.

[11:32] The word is, I'm unraveling. So have you ever had a sweater unravel on you? And you start pulling and pulling. And your mom says, stop.

You're going to ruin the sweater. Isaiah was unraveling. Isaiah felt for a moment what it feels like for sinners. What they feel forever in hell.

I'm a sinner. And God is holy. And that undoes me. It's destruction. You know, you look at people's lives.

And do you notice. The longer sinners live outside of Christ. Outside of the work of the Holy Spirit. Their lives begin to fall apart more and more and more. Relationships fall apart. Opportunities fall apart. Finances fall apart.

[12:28] Life falls apart. Well, why is that? Well, the wrath of God is being made known. The wages of sin is death. And as long as they continue on their course, the only thing that can happen is destruction.

Is unraveling. And so that's God's wrath at work. It's overpowering. It's terror. It's pain. It's destruction. And. And if God's wrath brings all of those things.

How can we say that it's beautiful? How can we talk about God's beauty? And how can it help me in any of my troubles?

If you're outside of Christ, that's probably the last attribute you want to talk about. The last thing you want to think about. Is God's wrath.

And yet we find it in our Bibles and we find it being used to do us good. And what we do find is people worshiping God for his displays of his wrath.

[13:40] They find his wrath beautiful. And praiseworthy. So. So how can we? How can we even talk about God's wrath being a help to us in our troubles?

And the simple answer is because God's wrath is perfect. It's the perfect display of his goodness. It's it's it's not man's sinful anger.

It's this perfect exercise of God's rightness, of his goodness, of his justice, his holiness. It's this exercise of his stunning, beautiful, magnificent character.

It's the perfect exercise of his love for what is good.

And so it's all those things that. We're talking we talked about of overpowering and terrible and terrifying. And but it's also beautiful.

[14:45] It's also stunningly glorious. Yes. The perfect angels have no complaints about God's wrath.

I want you to think of that. The angels in heaven. Have no complaints about God's wrath and just men made perfect, have no complaints about God's wrath.

Jesus. Jesus. The perfect man. Never felt like he had to apologize or cover up or in any way diminish God's wrath.

No one and all appreciate it and adore it and worship him for it and wonder at it. You can read Revelation. There's two things that are amazing about the book of Revelation.

I mean, there's a lot of things, but two things that stand together that are quite amazing. One, you the book of Revelation is full of praise. It's full of worship on our grace hems.

[15:55] There's a quote and it's from Revelation. And yet the book of Revelation is also the book of the greatest exploration of God's wrath.

So the souls of just men, perfect angels, Jesus, they don't endure God's wrath. They don't just tiptoe around it.

No, they hold harps and they sing. They hold harps and they sing. And so John listens and there's this roar of a great multitude in heaven.

I want to say this morning singing was great. It was very loud. I really liked it. John hears something a million times louder.

A roar of worship. Shouting with joy and adoration. And listen to what they sing. Hallelujah.

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.

[16:59] Are they happy? Are they rejoicing? Yes, it belongs to our God for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

Do you hear an echo of Nahum? Revelation is echoing Nahum there. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.

And again, they shouted, hallelujah. The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. And the 24 elders and the four living creatures fell down and they worship God who was seated on the throne. And they cried, amen, hallelujah. And next in Revelation, you hear a voice coming from the throne. Whose voice is that? I think it's Jesus. Jesus says, praise our God, all you his servants.

[18:02] Praise our God. So angels, men, Jesus, all crying, hallelujah. Hallelujah. This is something to praise God for.

Now, so what has set off this joyous, loud, unquenchable joy? Well, it's God's wrath. It's God's perfect wrath and how beautiful it is because it's a part of who he is.

He abhors sin. He abhors wickedness. So sin is this attack on creation.

Every grief and every sorrow that you have ever experienced in this life can be drawn back to sin. Every death. Every sickness. Every broken marriage. Every broken relationship. Every broken heart. We cannot forget this, that sin is an attack on God's good creation.

[19:18] It's an attack. It's a rot. It's an evil intruder. It's a very attack on everything good and right. Sin alone brings fear. Sin alone brings shame.

Sin alone destroys what is good and right. Sin is the night. Sin is the plague. Sin is the rot on creation. And does God just stand back and say, well, no, he abhors it.

He hates it. And he hates it perfectly with all that he is. Because the anger and the wrath of God is the other side of the coin of God is love.

And sin is the opposite of that. It's two sides of the same coin. God is love. So God hates sin. And God hates the workers of iniquity.

And Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. Because that's his heart. Jesus came on a destruction mission.

[20:25] He came to destroy the works of the devil. Well, why? Because that's who he is. That's who our God is. He is good and loving and perfect and stunning and beautiful. And he sees sin in creation.

And he wants to destroy it and remove it and cleanse it from the earth. Now, that's why part of our great hope, part of our great hope for this life and the life to come is that our God is a God of wrath. A God of wrath. God's wrath is not just this part of God that we tiptoe around. That we're ashamed to talk about.

That doesn't have anything positive to help us. No, God's wrath, just like all of his other attributes, helps us. We need to know it. We need to appreciate it.

We need to trust it. Well, how does it help us? What do we need to know and see and believe?

Well, I have three troubles that we're going to look at and apply God's wrath to it.

[21:30] And we're just going to get to the first one tonight. And that's sin in high places. And that's because that's what we see here in Nahum. It's God's wrath and sinful government. But it's not just sinful government.

It's all the sinful power structures that you see in the world. It's sin in high places because our world is not just sinful governments. That's not the only power at work.

It's a world of sinful power structures of sinful government, of sinful business, of sinful religion. You can read Revelation. All these power and high places opposing God.

So there are individual sins. And then there are systems of sin. All laws of sin and structures of sin. Systemic sin. And both are real, individual and systemic. The Bible talks about both of them. And it's that systemic, that system-wide, that worldwide, that government, business, army, military.

[22:34] That what we see going on in Nineveh. And that was Nineveh in Nahum's day. So to understand what Nahum is talking about and who Nineveh was and why he's rejoicing and taunting the city of Nineveh, we have to understand something about Nineveh.

It's been at the top of the Assyrian empire. Now, if you're like, I don't know the difference between Assyrian, Babylonian, I mean, all that stuff.

It gets all mixed up. Just let me give you a very super, super brief history lesson. The Assyrian empire lasted for like 800 to 900 years.

The Assyrian empire lasted for like 800 years.

Nahum says it was endless cruelty. It was like they did one thing that was cruel and then they did another thing and one after another after another. That was Nineveh.

[23 : 56] And they didn't care about people suffering. They didn't care about righteousness and justice. All they cared about was power and control and wealth. And they crushed and they killed and they were rich.

Nahum says you have more merchants than there are stars in the sky. Why? When it talks about what we read about all the nations are, in chapter 3 there, in verse 4, all because of the wanton lust of a harlot alluring the mistress of sorceries that enslaved nations by her prostitution.

That's not sexual language. That's, I mean, it's obviously in the form of sexual language, but it's wealth.

It's religion. It's how people, nations were subdued to Nineveh. They saw how wealthy and powerful and religious and beautiful she was and that they were attracted to her.

And that's why we're talking, we just can't say, oh, it's the sinful government. Because what you see is sinful government and men sinfully making money.

[25 : 08] Empire and wealth, they always go together. Armies and money go together. And so in Nineveh, there are businessmen and merchants who dominate and crush and kill.

And money could buy you justice. Or money could buy you injustice. It just depended on what you needed. Even in our own country, it's an established fact that going to prison or not going to prison is more closely tied to how much wealth you have than any other factor.

People who can afford lawyers generally escape prison and people who can't are incarcerated. It's not pretty.

It's not flattering. It's maybe not what you want to hear. Our ideal is justice, liberty and justice for all. But it's an ideal. It's not reality. And that was Nineveh.

Mighty army. Cruel, wealthy and evil. God looked at Nineveh. And he doesn't just say, well, that's just governments being governments.

[26 : 15] That's just people being people. In chapter 1 and verse 11, he calls everything that they're doing plotting against him. Now, who's the great plotter against God?

Well, Satan is the great plotter. The schemer. The one trying to take the throne. And the Lord looks at Nineveh and says, you're part of the plot.

It's a conspiracy. A rebellion against the king. Now, they don't recognize him as Lord. They don't see what they're doing as rebellion. But what they want is to establish their kingdom with their laws, doing it their way.

They're not asking your kingdom come. They're saying, we want our kingdom to come. And our kingdom is going to come over the dead bodies of people and the poverty of people.

And so what does God love? He loves righteousness and justice and mercy for the weak. But Nineveh throws it all off. They don't care about justice or righteousness or mercy.

[27 : 18] And they should have. They should have. And so this is rebellion against God. It's plotting against him. It's all a part of the serpent's rebellion.

It's all a part of the great dragon's rebellion against God. And God's people suffered. But even wider than that, it's so many others. The last verse in Nahum says, everyone who hears about you claps their hands.

It's not just Judah. It's everyone who hears about you claps his hands. Because Nineveh's victims weren't just God's people.

It was everyone. And that's what it can be like. And so what do we do? This is where we're getting in. What do we do when we fall under sinful rulers and wicked governments?

When there are evil powers in high places? What is our hope? What will get us through on that day?

[28 : 17] What do we lean on in God? Well, there's lots of answers. But Nahum's answer is wrath. We already looked at Nahum 1 and 3 when we talked about patience.

But Nahum 1 and 3. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power. But overall, Nahum's most interested in the second half of that quotation.

The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. So it's wrath. That's the end of the wicked.

And so you see evil in high places. You see destructive satanic forces bearing down, crushing the innocents. And it can be so discouraging. And it can be so disheartening.

And we say, what can we do? We're powerless before it. It can be so disheartening. I mean, it's then that it's good to know that Nahum's here. It's good to know that one of the 66 books of the Bible that the Lord says, this is what my people need to hear to live a godly life here is Nahum. [29 : 29] And it's the gospel of Nahum. And you can read chapters 2 and 3 and it's a strange gospel. It's full of bloodshed and slaughter. But Nahum's a message for us.

We read it. Nahum, God's messenger, taunts them again and again. He calls their soldiers women. He says God will utterly humiliate them. It says all their guards are like grasshoppers. They're just going to fly away the moment the heat gets turned on. And he taunts them relentlessly. Now, Nahum, it's interesting. That name means compassion.

It means comfort. And yet, there's no comfort here at all for Nineveh. But there's great comfort for God's people. There's great comfort for God's people.

It's no comfort at all to rebel kings, rebel premiers, rebel presidents. But it is comfort to God's people because holy, righteous, perfect wrath is coming.

[30 : 33] And nothing will stop it. No army will be big enough. No fortress will be strong enough. No city will be too rich. You won't be able to buy injustice then. You won't be able to pay off the judge to look another way.

You won't be able to hire a lawyer that will somehow connive things around so that you get away. You won't be able to escape. Martin Luther King Jr.

In our own world, in our own country, face great injustice and cruelty. Yes, there was evil in high places. But it was this kind of truth that kept him going.

Because God for him was not on the sideline. He was very much active in our world. And he works justice for the oppressed. And he brings wrath on the wicked. And listen to what he says.

Evil may so shape events that Caesar will occupy a palace. And Christ a king or Christ a cross. But that same Christ will rise up and split history into A.D. and B.C.

[31 : 38] So that even the life of Caesar must be dated by his name. Yes, the arc of the moral universe is long. But it bends towards justice. The universe is moral.

It's not chaos. It's not immoral. It's not amoral. It's moral. And it's bending towards justice. Now, a lot of people have taken those words out of context.

And they say it's just going to happen just because man is good and justice is bound to happen. But Martin Luther King Jr. believed it because he believed in a God of justice.

And a God of justice. And a God who acted in justice. Another person writing on Nahum wrote this. Reality is justice on the march.

Drawing near in range. And you see the wicked ruling.

[32 : 44] And you see pride. And you see lies and power. And you see injustice and cruelty. And this is what you can know. God loves justice.

He loves it. And he loves kindness. And he loves the truth. And he's going to stand up and defend justice, love, and kindness, and truth.

He opposes the proud. But he gives grace to the humble. And he loves all of that with a fierce, fierce love. And he loves it so vehemently and so passionately.

He won't live with wickedness forever. So if God wasn't a God of wrath, what hope would we have? So we go to the end.

We go to the end of Revelation and we see a new heaven and a new earth. And brothers and sisters, one day we are going to be there. A new heaven and a new earth. and the rebellion will be over there'll be no more darkness and no more plague and no more sin and no more destruction and no more unhappy people and no more abused no more batter no more governments reigning in terror no more ruthless businessmen and we'll be there and we'll be home at last and everywhere we look will be love and kindness and light and righteousness and everywhere there will be joy and we'll be there and we have to ask where did all of that stuff go where did all the wickedness go it was here and now it's gone it seemed like it was here to stay but now it's gone and we'll ask where did it go what happened and the answer is this that god is a god of wrath he's the god of nahum and so why will we live in a sin-free world forever because wrath will give it to us god's wrath will give it to us and so is wrath your comfort well if you're a child of god it should be and it is if you're a child of god then god's wrath is your hope and you can look at it and say that's beautiful that is good god's wrath is going to save us and god's wrath is going to give us a world to live in the home of righteousness but the only way god's wrath can be beautiful and something to comfort you is if

god's wrath has fallen god's wrath for your sin has fallen on jesus because i don't see how there's any way that you could come and say yeah that's god's wrath is something beautiful and good unless you see that all the of his wrath that is due for my sin fell upon my savior fell on his son we talked about the terror and the pain and the overpowering of god's wrath and it fell full force on the sacrifice it fell full force on our sacrifice the great day of judgment leap forward in time and fell upon his son for his people and so now there is none there's no no wrath none at all for us because his wrath is satisfied jesus took that cup and drank it completely dry and now all that's in my cup is blessing forevermore because all the wrath went on him and yes god stood against our sin and god's wrath and his rightful anger stood against us and and you know what we deserved it we don't have anything to say in our defense do we nothing to say we didn't have anything good to say for ourselves but so great was his love for us that he sent his son in our place as a substitute he bore the wrath he took the blame that came on him

[37 : 39] and he saved us and so the most important question for you is are you in christ are you in christ do you know that christ died for you are you under his blood wrath is coming because god is a god of wrath because god is holy and perfect and he loves justice and he loves righteousness and he abhors wickedness so wrath is inevitable as the sun coming up tomorrow so flee the wrath to come there's only one place to flee it's to jesus you hide in his sacrifice and he can save you and can i tell you that if you get inside of jesus christ if you're covered in him and you say he died for me and you know that then can i tell you everything changes everything changes your most importantly your view of god changes you don't have to be afraid anymore you don't have to pretend anymore you don't have to tiptoe around god's wrath anymore you don't have to say well i don't think god is like that he's not like that for me and you secretly know that that's just malarkey that's not going to help you what you think is completely irrelevant you won't have to secretly hate god for being angry or pretend it's not real what i'm saying is everything will change you won't have to dread god anymore not like that instead you can draw close you can draw close to him and you can look at him and say you know every every part of you is beautiful every aspect of you is beautiful and you start seeing him with new eyes and you start seeing that beauty that we talked about at the beginning and you say you're altogether perfect you're altogether magnificent and that's how you're meant to live that's how we were meant to live with looking at god living for god and saying i love him and and he loves me and that's eternal life that's happiness that's eternal life beginning here where i can wake up in the morning and say my god is beautiful and he is with me you're living at peace with your beautiful god that's what jesus christ gives us that's what life is like in jesus and so get in him get in him let's pray lord i pray for those who are outside of you our our lord jesus this evening and here they've heard about the wrath of god as as poorly and insufficiently as i've described it and you know holy spirit you can take that word and i pray that you would take that word and you would own it in their hearts and you would show them just how precious and beautiful the gospel is but but maybe finally and great and most of all through that through the gospel show them god what you are like beautiful and perfect in all of your attributes and put love and faith and hope in their hearts where there's nothing but death and decay now where there's blind eyes make them see i pray that for all of us we all need to see you better we all need to know you more we we all need to appreciate you and adore you and find you more attractive more than enough for us so please give us undivided heart

cleanse our hearts from anything that would contaminate us and open our eyes more and more that we might see your beauty and your glory and your majesty and fall deeper and deeper in love with you i ask this for jesus sake amen so