

The LORD is Good

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[0 : 00] Since ancient times, no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

The God who speaks to us in his living and active words. Let's turn in our Bibles to Nahum. Back in the Minor Prophets, minor not in importance, but minor in size compared to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

But if you can find Jonah, Micah, Nahum. And I'm sure Pastor will tell us there's a connection between Jonah and Nahum at some point in this book.

So Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and this evening we're going to read just the first eight verses. Since Pastor Colin preaches out of the ESV, I'll be reading out of the ESV.

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

[1 : 14] The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power.

And the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry.

He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither. The bloom of Lebanon withers. The mountains quake before him. The hills melt.

The earth heaves before him. The world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger?

His wrath is poured out like fire. And the rocks are broken into pieces by him. The Lord is good. A stronghold in the day of trouble.

[2 : 17] He knows those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood, he will make a complete end of the adversaries and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

Let's pray together. Amen. Our God and our Father, we thank you that you are the true and living God, that we come not to idols that cannot help us, that are not wise, that are not powerful, that are not love.

But we come to you. And we thank you that these attributes of yours are meant to increase our faith in you. And we pray that through the preaching of your word, we would be strengthened in our faith.

We've seen more attributes, even in this reading, of your wrath and your justice, your power, your punishment of sin, but your goodness as well to your people who take refuge in you.

So come and teach us more of yourself. Help our pastor as he opens the scriptures and preaches them to us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, we are beginning a new sermon series this evening through the book of Nahum.

[3 : 36] And as was already said, it's one of the minor prophets, but it's not minor in significance. It is shorter in its length, like many of the other minor prophets.

In fact, all of those minor prophets were often collected together in ancient times before we had books bound like our Bibles. And those prophets were collected together in a single scroll.

And it was called the Book of the Twelve, or shortened to just the Twelve. So we heard the Twelve Apostles this morning, and now we consider one of the Twelve Minor Prophets this evening.

Just three chapters here in Nahum. And tonight we're going to look at the first eight verses together. And in those eight verses, four questions arise.

Two very short, very brief answers to two of those first questions, and then two that we'll spend a decent amount of time on together. And so here's the first question that we need to ask of this text.

[4 : 38] Who were the people of Nineveh? Who were the people of Nineveh? We see in verse one that this is an oracle concerning Nineveh. Now you are probably familiar with Nineveh.

During biblical times, Sennacherib made it the capital of Assyria. It was a city located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River in that region of Mesopotamia.

And it was a city that flourished. It was large. It was mighty. It was well-known, and many times for really terrible reasons. Nineveh and its people played a well-known role in another book of the Bible, as was already mentioned, the book of Jonah.

But that's not where Nineveh first shows up in the Bible. We read of Nineveh all the way back in Genesis. Genesis chapter 10. In this chapter of the Bible, it details the genealogy of Noah.

And it shows us the nations that came from Noah and from his sons. And one of their descendants was a man named Nimrod. And Nimrod was a great warrior.

[5 : 49] And he built these impressive cities. Several cities are attributed to him as the one who raised them up. And Nineveh was one of those cities. So all the way back in Genesis chapter 10, this military might of the city is already foreshadowed.

This great warrior built the city, and the city would be known for its power and might. Now, not much more is said of Nineveh in the Old Testament until we come to Jonah.

And there we obviously learn quite a bit about the city of Nineveh. We learn of its reputation. Nineveh was known for its wickedness. The people of Nineveh were infamous for their cruelty, for their horrid treatment, their savagery towards women and children of enemy nations.

In ancient Near Eastern writings, not just in the scriptures even, graphic descriptions of Ninevites torturing and killing enemies can be found.

So the depravity of man was on display in the city of Nineveh. And yet, in the book of Jonah, God was merciful to Nineveh.

[6 : 57] He sent Jonah to preach to Nineveh and to tell Nineveh that God was going to bring judgment down upon them for their sinful ways. And how did they respond?

They repented. They turned in faith to the Lord, much to the disappointment of Jonah. They turned to the Lord in faith. Of all the cities, of all the people, you would have least expected Nineveh to be a place of spiritual revival.

And yet, that's exactly what came to Nineveh through the preaching of Jonah. The people were spared the wrath of God. So then, fast forward roughly 100 years to sometime around 650 B.C.

We know this is about the time that the oracle was delivered by Nahum because the fall of Thebes in Egypt is mentioned in chapter 3. That happened around 664 B.C.

Then Nineveh itself fell in 612. So this oracle was delivered sometime between those two dates, roughly 100 years after the events in Jonah. So here we return to Nineveh in the book of Nahum.

[8 : 09] You could call Nahum the sequel to Jonah. And we find in this sequel that the people of Nineveh have returned to their evil ways. The judgment which God had relented of in the book of Jonah will now indeed be poured out upon the people of Nineveh.

His wrath will be rekindled. And unlike in Jonah, there will be no repentance found in the city. The people of this city had clearly forgotten the God who had spared them once before.

So that's a picture of who the people of Nineveh are. Let's briefly answer our second question. Who is Nahum?

And we find the answer to this question, who is Nahum, in the second half of the first verse. This is the book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh. So on a very basic level, Nahum wrote this book.

And again, on a very basic level, he lived in Elkosh. We don't know much about where Elkosh is. We don't know much of that city at all. This is the only place that's mentioned in Scripture.

[9 : 16] It was likely located in the southern kingdom of Judah, considering the northern kingdom of Israel had already fallen. Now Nahum is addressing the people of Judah. But aside from Elkosh as Nahum's home, we also know very little of Nahum.

This is the only place that he's mentioned in the Old Testament. He's just introduced to us here as the author. His name, though, gives us some insight into the purpose of this book.

His name means full of comfort. It might actually be the shortened form of Nahum Yah, which is where we get the name Nehemiah from, which means God of comfort or God comforts.

So in this short book, we are going to see comfort will indeed be given to God's people. We may know very little about this prophet, but the Lord has much to say to us through him.

Verse 1 tells us that Nahum receives a vision, which he then speaks to the people of Judah. Now by vision, this is getting at the idea of revelation. Revelation from God.

[10 : 27] This is not just the musings of a man. This is not just the thoughts of a man named Nahum. No, this is what has been set apart as divinely inspired by God.

These are God's words that he is now speaking through Nahum. So let's dive into his words and let's consider the third question. Who is the Lord?

Let's read this together beginning in verse 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.

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power. And the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

He rebukes the sea and makes it dry. He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither. The bloom of Lebanon withers. The mountains quake before him. The hills melt.

[11 : 27] The earth heaves before him. The world and all who dwell in it. Nahum wastes no time with an introduction. His words are jarring to us.

He's not like a preacher who begins with perhaps a humorous story or a preacher who begins with an interesting account. He doesn't begin even as I just did with an introduction of great length.

He begins like a preacher with a bullhorn in his hand. Nineveh, meet the Lord. He's against you. You have aroused this lawgiver, this judge, his displeasure.

You have angered him. And these three characteristics of God are then put on display. His jealousy, his vengeance, and his wrath.

And here's how we're to understand how they fit together. Because God is jealous for his glory, he will bring to justice those who oppose him.

[12 : 30] And that justice is going to come in the form of his wrath. And it is a wrath that those who have rebelled against him cannot escape. So let's unpack that together.

Nineveh had broken God's laws. Nineveh had defied him. Nineveh had defied his ways. This city was guilty of great sin. They had transgressed God's laws.

And to do that is an affront against God himself. To sin is not just to disregard what God has said. To sin is to shake our fist at God, to say to him, you have no authority over me.

That is how the people of Nineveh were treating the Lord. Now this fist shaking would not be overlooked. As our text says, God will not clear the guilty.

He won't let the guilty off scotch-free. Why though? Why is that? Because of his jealousy. Because of the jealousy of the Lord.

[13 : 33] Now we might think, isn't jealousy bad? We often think of it as this out-of-control emotion that needs to be reined in. And nothing good ever comes from hearing of a jealous ex-boyfriend.

Galatians 5 even lists jealousy among sins that the Christian is to flee from, is to put off. We read it alongside these other sins.

Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, and then jealousy. And Paul gives this warning.

Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. So how can it be that jealousy is listed among these sins that the Christian is to put off and yet it's attributed to God here in Nahum?

Because unlike sinful man, God always has a right to be jealous. Always. He is supreme.

[14 : 38] He has no rivals. And so any who do rival him, who seek to steal his honor, he's going to act to protect and to defend what rightfully belongs to him and to him alone.

He always has a right to be jealous. And here's something else that we should be so glad for. His jealousy is always for something good.

He's not a cruel, tyrannical, unstable God. He's jealous for the truth. He's jealous for his people.

He's jealous for his own glory. We think of Isaiah 48.11 where God says, my glory I will give to no one. For God to be jealous means that he is deeply committed to protecting and safeguarding that which belongs to him.

So he's going to come to the defense of what is rightfully his and he won't share it with anyone else. What God deserves, what is his, he has every right to seek.

[15 : 49] So he won't tolerate disloyalty because he alone deserves to be worshipped. So God is jealous. And his jealousy is then the grounds for his vengeance.

His vengeance emerges from his jealousy. For God to avenge himself means that he is going to bring to justice those who have wronged him.

He is not going to let the wrongs against him go unpunished. So if God is jealous for the truth, for his people, for his glory, then we need to see that Nineveh, they had transgressed God's laws, the truth.

They had tormented God's people. They had trampled upon God's honor. And this good God who is jealous for all of these things will not let the guilty go unpunished.

The God who is jealous will take vengeance. And his vengeance will come in the form of his wrath. So his jealousy, his vengeance, and his wrath.

[16 : 59] So Nahum is saying to the people of Nineveh, the Lord is coming. And he's coming in great power. Power that we've even already sang of this evening.

And beginning in verse 3, we see that power and authority over the created order on display. It is a fear-inducing arrival. The text says, his way is in whirlwind and storm.

That means he's dangerous. That means that he is not safe. His way is like Proverbs 127. Listen to Proverbs 127. When terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind when distress and anguish come upon you.

So this is the manner in which God is going to arrive for the people of Nineveh. Destruction is coming. the clouds are described as the dust of his feet.

Kids, where are the clouds? Are the clouds below our feet? Are the clouds on the ground? No, the clouds are way up there in the sky.

[18 : 14] The only time that we could ever say we may be above those clouds is when we're in an airplane, right? And yet we look down on those clouds and we're struck with awe, at least I am.

We look down on those clouds and we think, wow, the closer I am to them, the bigger and more impressive they are. So God is above the clouds and we could say, well, I can get in an airplane and get above the clouds, but when we're in an airplane above the clouds, the clouds are not like dust under our feet.

To God, that is what they are like. If he were to have feet, just little particles, the greatness of God on display as we consider the clouds are the dust of his feet.

And all that he has created submits to his authority as one who is over all of his creation. The highest of all creation that we have here is the clouds on earth.

And God is over that, which means he's over everything. Verse 4 says, he rebukes the sea and makes it dry. He dries up all the rivers. We've seen that before, of course, the Red Sea, the Jordan River.

[19 : 22] At the blast of your nostrils, the waters piled up. The floods stood up in a heap. The deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The grass and the flowers of the field, the trees of the forests wither before him.

And these forests that were listed were some of the greatest forests in the area. The trees of Lebanon were well known. They were impressive. They wither like weeds before him.

The mountains quake. The hills melt. It is as though they shake with fear. What is immovable? It moves before him.

And so the created order bows at his command. All of it, the bodies of water, the grass of the field, the forests and the mountains, all the world acknowledges the authority of the Lord.

And humanity is not exempt. The world and all who dwell in it. And so Nahum is saying, Nineveh, that includes you.

[20 : 28] Because if God's wrath is stayed, if the guilty were in fact cleared, if sin was left unpunished, then the honor that is rightly due to God, that honor would be trampled upon.

It would be dragged in the mud. So God must come. His jealousy for his honor demands it. And yet, this God who is jealous, this God who is avenging, who is wrathful, who is great in power, is also slow to anger.

We see that as well here in Nahum 1. The Lord is slow to anger. He is holding it back. He is storing it up until just the time that he has determined to pour it out.

And this is a reminder to us that the Lord is patient. And why would he be patient? Because he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live, Ezekiel 33 says.

Or in New Testament words, we're warned in Romans 2.4, do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead to your repentance.

[21 : 54] But then what does Paul say in the very next verse? So God is patient.

He is keeping back his wrath. And he does this with the people of Nineveh. He had held back his wrath for a time. But then he did make a complete end of them.

He brought them to ruin. At the hands of the Medes and the Babylonians, the city was razed, never to be rebuilt. To this day, there is a village where there was once a great and mighty city.

And with the destruction of Nineveh, the Assyrian empire was brought to an end. Let's consider the fourth and the last question. Who are you?

So as we turn our attention to these last three verses, man's relationship to God comes into view. Who are you in relationship to this God?

[23 : 04] Let's read beginning in verse 6. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.

The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. He knows those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood, he will make a complete end of the adversaries and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

Out of this single question, who are you? Two more specific questions arise. Are you someone who will one day fall before his wrath?

or are you someone who this day finds refuge in his goodness? Will you fall before his wrath or do you find refuge in his goodness?

If you are not in Christ this evening, God is patient towards you. Each morning that you wake up with breath in your lungs, with blood flowing through your veins, pumped by your heart, is a reminder to you of God's kindness, even as you continue in rebellion against him.

[24 : 30] Do you see his patience? Do you understand his patience? Or do you confuse his patience for weakness? Do you mistake his being slow to judge as feeble inability?

Do you conclude that God isn't pouring out his wrath because he's not as strong as he wants me to believe? If you're not in Christ tonight and you think that way, or you continue in your sin and you use that as an excuse, you are wrong.

His patience is not a sign of his weakness, but just the opposite. His patience is a sign of his power and his strength. Think about it like this.

When human authorities are threatened, what is their most natural response? it's to snuff out that threat as quickly as possible.

It is to act now to avoid that threat growing, getting larger and more powerful. We have a saying, nip it in the bud. That's what human authorities do.

[25 : 36] We see a threat, we nip it in the bud. But God is threatened by no one. He doesn't need to act quickly. He doesn't need to nip anything in the bud because what he has under control now he'll have under control tomorrow and the next and the next until he decides that the time is right to act.

No one forces his hand. No one compels him to do something because he's concerned that the rebellion will get out of control. God is not in heaven wringing his hands with worry, sweat dripping from his brow, just hoping that his plans will work out, just hoping that his enemies, his adversaries, you if you are not in Christ, will fail in your rebellion.

His attitude, his posture is anything but that. He sits on his throne and what does Psalm 2 say? He laughs. The nations rage, the peoples plot, the kings of the earth set themselves, the rulers take counsel and they say, let us burst these bonds apart, let us cast away these cords that the Lord has bound us with.

And he who sits in the heavens laughs. He holds them in derision. They are a mockery to him. Sinful man can do nothing to thwart God.

Sinful man can do nothing to escape God's wrath. That sinful man is storing up for himself. So what does Psalm 2 say to do to the wicked?

[27 : 18] What does Psalm 2 say? Kiss the Son. Submit to the Son. Bow to him. Turn to Christ in humble repentance and faith lest he be angry and you perish in the way for his wrath is quickly kindled.

Nahum says his wrath is poured out like fire. Nahum says it is an overflowing flood that you cannot escape the day it is released.

So yes the Lord is patient but when his patience runs out his wrath is quickly kindled. It does not take him long. It takes him no time at all to pour out that wrath.

God will make a complete end of his enemies. If you are his enemy he will make a complete end of you. he will pursue you into darkness.

You stand no chance against him. Do you see that your greatest problem what you most need saving from is in fact God himself in all of his jealous avenging wrath because of your sin.

[28 : 36] Don't misunderstand his patience for weakness. He is perfectly capable to act now to make an end of you now. So do you see his kindness towards you that he has patience towards you.

He does not delight in the death of the wicked. He is slow to anger but a time will come when that patience runs out and you will have nowhere to run that you might escape in that day.

But today this evening right now he does provide the way of escape the way of salvation through his son turn to Christ tonight that your sins might be forgiven and you will find this very same God the one that you cannot escape the one that you cannot flee from is actually the God that you flee to.

You run to him to be the very refuge that you need. Psalm 2 says blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Nahum says he is a stronghold in the day of trouble. He knows those who take refuge in him. So will you fall or will you find refuge?

[29 : 53] Will you fall before his wrath or will you find refuge in his goodness? Don't ignore the inevitable. You will face the righteous judge one day.

You will find him. You will stand before him one day. And Nahum asks who can stand before his indignation? You can find him to be your greatest comfort and joy and safety.

But don't wait until all that can be found is the heat of his anger. Now if you are in Christ this evening you have a refuge in this God.

In that day of judgment when you appear before the throne the righteous judge will declare you innocent. You are innocent because Christ took your place.

Because he bore God's wrath that you deserved. And so Nahum asks who can stand before his indignation? You will stand. And that indignation will be nowhere to be found.

[31 : 00] That is wonderfully good news. Joy, peace, contentment are yours now. Because that final future day is settled. Your name has been cleared of all wrongdoing.

The day of trouble for the guilty will be a day of peace and rest for God's people. But there are many troubling days now.

many days of hardship and pain and suffering in this life. Because God's enemies have not been fully and finally defeated.

The world, the flesh, the devil continue to rage, though their rage is in vain. Trouble is all around us. What is your response?

Where do you turn? What do you do? Because unlike our God, who is strong and capable, we are weak, we are frail, we are feeble, we are so easily rattled and shaken, we are powerless in ourselves, we need protection, we are in constant need of rescue, and God meets us in our need.

[32 : 11] He is the refuge for us all of our days. All of the days in this life, He is our stronghold, and on the day of judgment to come as well.

now, how can we be so sure of this? How can we be so sure that God really, truly is our refuge? How can we be sure that He will indeed be our help and not our harm in time of need?

One of the most beloved verses in the Bible, and for good reason, is Romans 8, 28. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.

So we cling to that truth in times of trouble. We trust God. We find our refuge in God because what He does is for our good.

Nahum works backwards from this wonderful truth of that verse in Romans 8. It's as though Nahum asks and then answers this question.

[33 : 21] But why? But why does God work all things together for good for those who love Him? Because Nahum says, God is good and He can only act according to His character.

God is good and so He works all things together for the good of those who love Him. To do anything else would mean that God is not good. So are you troubled?

Are you afflicted with sorrow? God's word assures us that He is bringing good to pass in your life because He Himself is good.

He is a stronghold in the day of trouble for those who know Him. He is that. It's not just that He goes and He builds a stronghold, that He gets brick and mortar and He builds this really fantastic stronghold and says, you go run into that, you'll be safe, I built it, you can trust that.

He Himself is our stronghold. He says, you run to me and I will be that for you. Proverbs 18.10 says, the name of the Lord is a strong tower.

[34 : 34] The righteous man runs into it and is safe. For those who belong to God, for those who have been bought with His blood, we are sure for every day of our life that we are safe, that we are protected by Him.

Not that He keeps us from every trouble and affliction, but He will not let us be lost in the ultimate sense. He will sustain us through them. He will protect our souls.

He will keep our souls. He will safeguard our souls. And He will work good for us, as painful as that is sometimes. So what troubles you today?

What trials do you face? If you are in Christ, you have a God who knows you, who will never leave you, and out of His goodness, brings about good in your life.

King David encountered much suffering in life. David endured many days of trouble. And what a gift it is to us that we have a window into His suffering and His response to suffering contained in the Word of God, in the Psalms.

[35 : 49] Psalm 31 begins by echoing the words of Nahum 1, In you, O Lord, do I take refuge. Let me never be put to shame.

In your righteousness, deliver me. And then Nahum goes on to express his trust in the Lord. And he says, Into your hand I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the Lord.

And what was that trust grounded in? Well, listen to verse 19. Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you.

So David trusted God and part of that trust was because he remembered the abundant goodness of God. Sinful man, Romans 2 says, stores up wrath for himself.

[36 : 56] But God, Psalm 31 says, stores up goodness for his people. We face many days of trouble in this life.

but God is storing up goodness for us. And much of that goodness he gives to us even now. We have experienced it. We have tasted and seen that the Lord is good.

So look no further than your own salvation. What a good gift that is from God. And how much more of his goodness could we recount even this evening?

We can say with David, oh, how abundant is your goodness. And we can continue to trust God in our days of trouble knowing how much more of that stored up goodness will enjoy in all of its abundance for all of eternity before his throne.

Let's pray together. heavenly father, we give you thanks for the book of Nahum that teaches us so much of who you are.

[38 : 05] That you indeed are a God who will by no means clear the guilty. That you are a God who is jealous and avenging and wrathful towards your enemies, towards your adversaries.

And yet father, what a joy it is to know that for your people, you are a refuge in time of trouble. And that itself is grounded in your goodness.

We pray father that you would help us even through this week to remember your goodness towards us that you have demonstrated through your son Jesus Christ. That you have brought us to yourself, you have made us your own and then you have now equipped us to live a life in which we do good works.

We pray that we would rest in, that we would find our refuge in knowing that you are good. That we would give you praise, that we would give you honor that is due your name for you are a jealous God, jealous for all that is good.

We pray father that you would be magnified in our midst this week. It's in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.