

June 1, 2025

Return: The God Who Knows

Nahum 1:1-7

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...theme. We're starting a new book today. Nahum is a difficult book to get through. It's not a book you would choose for your devotions. But that's the benefit to bible reading plans. It's the same when preaching. It's not a book that one would pick to do a sermon series on but the benefit to preaching through entire books, or sections of books, it forces you to look at portions of scripture that may be difficult, or hard to get through, but they are no less the word of God than some of the more familiar passages, and so, they are worthy of our attention.

Now, unlike the first few books we have looked at as we've made our way through the Minor Prophets, Nahum is all judgment. But the judgment that is spoken of here in this book, is not going to be poured out on Israel because of its sin, but on one of her arch enemies. Nahum is writing after the northern tribes of Israel were defeated by the Assyrians and the remnant of those who were left were scattered. And God's people may have been wondering about God's justice. Sure, they had rejected God and his judgment had come upon them. But what about this ruthless, and godless nation, who didn't have the covenant promises of God, would God allow them to continue to prosper while his people suffer? Well, Nahum answers that question, and much more, so let's jump right in this morning. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the word of God. [Read passage]

Nahum was a Jewish prophet whose name means 'consolation' or 'comforter'. He had a grave and weighty message, that's what the word, "oracle" means here in vs.1. This heavy burden was to pronounce the Lord's severe punishment on the great enemy of God's people at the time, the Assyrian empire. What may have added to the heaviness of this burden was the fact that Assyria is still at the height of its power. It's not as though Assyria is on the decline and Nahum is adding on and kicking them while they are down. No, they are still the world's number one, so to speak.

Now, 100 years earlier, this same Nineveh had repented of its sins and had been spared God's judgment when the prophet Jonah brought a message of hope from the Lord, calling them to turn from their wicked ways and trust in him. In this way, Nahum almost acts like a part 2, or the sequel, of the Book of Jonah. However, unlike in the book of Jonah, their slide back into sinfulness in generation after generation, their threats to God's people, and ungodly domination of the known world, has now sealed their fate. And Nahum has revealed that God is jealous for his people, but also a God of justice.

Look with me at vs. 2-3. How can it be said that God is jealous? Alan Redpath, in his book, *Law and Liberty, The Ten Commandment for Today*, said this, "God's jealousy is love in action. He refuses to share the human heart with any rival, not because He is selfish and wants us all for Himself, but because He knows that upon that loyalty to Him depends our very life... God is not jealous of us: He is jealous for us."

Nahum also says, "The Lord is also slow to anger," a common phrase from the Old Testament. It means God is far more patient than any man. Though there is a time and

place where he does display his anger, it doesn't come quickly or randomly. But he is just. He will not at all acquit the wicked. God is not like an unjust judge who simply lets the guilty go out of a false sense of compassion. We can't just hope that God will say, "All is forgiven." Sin must be accounted for. Every sin will be paid for, either in hell or at the cross, but God will not acquit the wicked. This was meant to bring comfort to Israel as they saw their godless enemies prosper and they were wondering what God was going to do about it or if he could do anything about it.

Now, Nahum is a short book, only three chapters, and the three chapters spell out the stages of Assyria's downfall. And this prophecy delivered by Nahum is the sermon that Jonah wanted to preach but didn't. God now says to Nahum, "Preach a sermon to Nineveh, and this time there is no room for repentance. There is no place for mercy. They are about to be destroyed." And Nahum describes, in vivid detail, how God is about to, not only crush Nineveh, but the entire Assyrian Empire. The dominant, superpower of the world at that time was about to be completely wiped out.

And so it's somewhat surprising that in the middle of the first chapter describing this crushing defeat that is coming for the Assyrians, we find this wonderful promise for God's people, seemingly coming out of nowhere. With all the chaos swirling around, the Northern Kingdom of Israel already destroyed and the Southern Kingdom, Judah, under constant threats, we find this promise in vs. 7 "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows those who take refuge in Him."

Now what all does that mean? How do we unpack that? Well, there are three distinct phrases in that verse and we'll break them all down together and take a look at each one.

The first phrase is, "the Lord is good." We could spend hours talking about the goodness of God. In fact, we're going to have all eternity to do so. It's his defining characteristic. A.W. Tozer once wrote, "The goodness of God is infinitely more wonderful than we will ever be able to comprehend." Charles Spurgeon, the famed English preacher, said this about the goodness of God, "In the greatness of our troubles there may often be space for the greater display of the goodness of God." And Matt Chandler, the senior pastor of the Village Church in Texas and a popular voice in the Church today, has said, "The greater the knowledge of the [goodness] of God in our life, the more likely you are to praise him in the storm." The Lord is good. It's who he is. It's his very nature.

To say that God is good means that God always acts in accordance to what is right and true. Goodness is who God is, it's his very essence and he cannot contradict himself. God is the standard of all that is good. How else can we know something is evil but to compare it to what is good and God, himself, is that standard.

And the fact that God is good means that he has no evil in him, his intentions and motivations are always good, he always does what is right, and the outcome of his plan is always good. One of my favorite verses of scripture has become a common refrain in my prayer life, and it's just a short phrase found right in the middle of Psalm 119, vs. 68, speaking of the Lord, the psalmist writes, "You are good and all that you do is good, teach me your ways."

God's goodness should lead to thankfulness on our part, which goes back to the Matt Chandler quote from earlier, it should lead us to praise and thankfulness. Over and

over again in the psalms we read, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” (Psalm 107:1; 118:1; 136).

However, people do not naturally want to follow or thank God. Instead, “people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). In the Old Testament, the Israelites repeatedly rejected God’s good law, forgot His goodness toward them, and were unfaithful to Him: “They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them” (Psalm 78:11).

And so ultimately, God’s goodness is seen in his plan to redeem us, to purchase us back from the penalty of our sin. This is the gospel and the gospel is indeed “good news.” In his goodness, God sent His Son to become the perfect and spotless sacrifice so that we could be forgiven of our sins. God does not want “anyone to perish, but for everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

There is only one who is fully and truly good, and that one is God himself. This good God invites us to seek him and to “taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him” (Psalm 34:8).

More on that in a moment, as that same word refuge is used in the third phrase of verse 7, but first let’s take a look at the second phrase here. Not only is the Lord good, but “He is a stronghold in the day of trouble.” A stronghold, in the strictest sense, according to Webster’s dictionary, is “a place that has been fortified so as to protect it against attack.” Strongholds were strategically located in high places, making them difficult to conquer. They served as places of defense, or a refuge, and ultimately, a stronghold is a place of safety.

And here, God is depicted as a stronghold in times of trouble because he is seen as a protector and refuge, offering security and strength to those who trust in him. This imagery highlights God’s power and faithfulness to us in the face of adversity. We can find comfort in God’s promise to be our stronghold, turning to him for guidance and strength in times of need. We all have testimonies...

This means God is our protection, or a “fortress,” against the dangers we face in this world. It implies that he provides a safe haven and shields his people from harm and adversity. God is our strength, empowering believers to overcome challenges and endure difficult times. The concept of God as a stronghold emphasizes his trustworthiness and faithfulness. We can trust that he will be our strong tower as we sang about earlier today.

This also means that he is the one who ultimately controls the circumstances of our lives. And understanding God as a stronghold provides comfort and assurance to us because it reinforces the idea that we are not alone in our struggles and that God is actively involved in our lives. This should encourage us to rely on his strength rather than our own, which leads us to a deeper dependence on God and a stronger faith.

Before we move on, I think it’s important to point out that there is a duration to the trouble that is spoken of here. Notice that it says, “the day of trouble.” Another quote from Spurgeon, “Remember that it is only a day; it is not a week, nor a month, and God will not permit the devil to add an extra hour to that day; it is a ‘day of trouble.’ There is an end to all our griefs.” Whether in this life, or the next when Jesus comes again, we will be delivered from every trouble we have found in this world and will exchange it all for life everlasting in

the Kingdom of God where there will be no more suffering, no more tears, no more pain or grief and no more death. And what a day that will be.

And, finally, we come to the last phrase, “He knows those who take refuge in Him.” What does it mean? Why is that a comforting promise? Because I can say I know Tiger Woods. I was working at golf tournament one time while we were living in Virginia and I’ve met him. But do I really know him? Not at all. I’ve met him, but that’s it.

If that’s all this promise means, then we’re in trouble. “The Lord knows those who take refuge in Him,” means something far deeper. He knows everything about us. He knows your name. He knows your vulnerabilities. He knows your addictions. He knows everything about you. He knows your story.

But not with a cold indifference, but with compassion and love. 1 Peter 5:7 puts it this way, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” He knows us so well, he knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows exactly what we need before we even know we need it. And the psalmist says, “Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely.” Before I am even able to form the words of my protest, petition or praise, you know it completely.

He knows those who take refuge in Him. Nothing escapes His attention. This is where that familiar verse in Jeremiah 29:11 comes into play when God says, “I, what?, I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you a future and a hope.” And most people stop there without realizing the next verses (12-13) says, “Plans to lead you to call upon me and seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” And so this verse is not about prosperity, but about seeking and finding him. Jesus said when we do this with all of our hearts, then all these things will be added unto you. Not the treasurers or the prosperity itself, but the Lord himself.

You see, the verse says, “He knows those who take refuge in him,” meaning the plans, the intentionality behind whatever it is you are wrestling with today, its all designed by a good and love God to lead you to take refuge in him, to seek him with all your heart, to fly to him for refuge.

There’s one other way of thinking about what it means that God knows us. Think about the opposite of God knowing us. Jesus said in Matt. 7:22, “On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast our demons in your name and do mighty works in your name?’ And Jesus says, ‘Then I will declare to them, ‘Depart from Me, I never knew you.’” I can’t imagine any words more terrifying that anyone could hear from God than those, “I never knew you. Depart from Me.” Which is why this promise is so rich. He says, through the prophet Nahum, “He knows those who take refuge in Him.” He knows us, meaning, he claims us, he embraces us, he holds us fast and he says, “You are mine.”

“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows those who take refuge in Him.” Whatever you are facing today, this is a great promise to know. And its not just platitudes and words, but its recognizing that we need a stronghold because we don’t have one of your own. It’s that we come looking for refuge and we run to the only one who provides it, who is the refuge, Jesus. Let’s pray and prepare our hearts for the table of the LORD.