

June 8, 2025

Return: The Lord is Victor

Nahum 1:9-15

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...Return, realigning with God...making our way through the minor prophets in chronological order. We have come to the book of Nahum and as I mentioned last week, Nahum acts like a sequel to the more familiar book of Jonah, in which God calls the prophet to go to Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian Empire and arch enemy of Israel, to preach a message of repentance. We know story, Jonah refuses and boards a ship in the opposite direction to avoid what God has asked him to do. God causes a storm to rise up and threaten the lives of everyone onboard and so Jonah, knowing its his fault, asked to be thrown overboard and the storm stops. Just before Jonah drowns though, God rescues him by sending a large fish to swallow Jonah, and after spending 3 days in the belly of the fish, Jonah is spit up onto the shore and only then makes his way to Nineveh to preach the message God commanded him to give. And to our surprise, although we find out later in the book not to Jonah's surprise, everyone from the King down to the lowliest servant, repents and turns toward God from their evil ways. Jonah is upset by this and the book ends with Jonah sitting outside the city hoping that their new found repentance isn't genuine and that God will rain down judgment on the city just as he promised he would if they did not repent.

Now, nearly 100 years later, in the book of Nahum we find ourselves once again with Nineveh as the target of God's judgement and the message that Jonah wanted to preach. After turning to the Lord in repentance, one generation after another of Ninevites forgot about the LORD and they began to turn back to their evil and ruthless ways against God's people including conquering the Northern Kingdom of Israel and now threatening the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

As I pointed last week, all the actions of God are good, even his acts of judgement and punishment on the wicked and unbelieving. And part of his being good is the upholding of his righteousness, holiness and his purity. His goodness is expressed in the removal of all that pollutes his glory and harms his good world. But we live in the already and not yet. God's Kingdom is here, being established by the Lord Jesus at his first appearing. But we wait, enduring the wickedness and evil of our world, and to our shame, contributing a lot to it ourselves, until Jesus comes again a makes all things right. To those who truly trust in him, God shows his goodness in his blessings. To those who pollute his glory God shows his goodness through victory over his enemies.

Now Nineveh by this point is the very picture of evil. We are not going to solve the problem of evil here today but, as God's people, we can have hope in the midst of a world filled with evil because ultimately we know that God will one day finally destroy all evil when Jesus comes again as both rescuer to the believer and judge to those who have rejected him for "God will by no means clear the guilty." [Nahum 1:3] If you are able, please stand with me as I read today's passage from the prophet Nahum 1:9-15 [Read Passage]

Our first point we're going to look at today is that these verses we've just read expose the evil in Nineveh and God is going to bring his judgment on them because they have made evil plans against the LORD and his covenant people. Really, this is one of the main themes of the entire book, and as we read these verses, we are able to see how they symbolizes evil at all times, especially in our present time. This is why the Scriptures are so relevant for us today for God word is living and active.

This section continues the theme of judgment begun in the previous verses we looked at last week in the beginning of ch. 1. And here, the prophet uses the pronoun "you" to address the people of Nineveh. The Ninevites had thought they could destroy God's covenant people. But this would not come to pass because the LORD is good and is a "stronghold" for his people as we highlighted last week in v. 7.

The prophet Nahum exposes their plot against the Lord, as he mentions in vs. 9, and he found it beyond his comprehension that the Ninevites thought they could revolt against the LORD. The word "to plot" here in vs. 9, and again in vs. 11, means to establish a plan to harm someone. The Ninevites thought they could destroy God's covenant people, and by implication, bring shame to the LORD. But Nahum makes the point that any plotting against the LORD is useless.

The point is that such plans would come to nothing because the LORD is all-powerful. He would make a full end of his enemies. He would not give the Assyrians a second chance to attack his people, as he points out in the end of vs.9, "trouble will not rise up a second time." Thus, God would destroy the Assyrians before they could carry out their evil plans.

Nahum not only points out that their plans will fail but he further describes Nineveh's destruction by using the imagery of fire. He says in vs. 10, [read]. Simply put, the LORD would destroy the Ninevites just as fire destroys tangled thorns or the stubble left after the grain is harvested. In this case, the prophecy was literal, as history tells us that Nineveh was destroyed by fire around 612 BC.

Nahum continues in vs. 11, [read]. This statement is a reference to the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, who reigned from 705 BC to 681 BC. It's interesting to know that after the failed siege of Jerusalem mentioned in 2 Kings 18-19, that I briefly mentioned last week, Sennacherib left Judah in defeat after losing 185,000 of his men and went back to Nineveh, where his own two sons "killed him with the sword" (2 Kings 19:37). But even after this happened, they continued to plot against the Lord because their king was a "worthless counselor." The word translated as "worthless" also can be translated "wicked" or "evil."

In our passage, this wicked, or evil, behavior refers to the evil plans of Assyrians against the LORD. Such plans would not come to fruition because the LORD would make a complete end of them. And sure enough, as mentioned earlier, the city of Nineveh fell to the Babylonians not long after.

Not only do these verses expose the evil of Nineveh but they also tell us how God will expel all evil and those who plot against him. Nahum encourages the people of Judah to rejoice because God will destroy Nineveh to give them peace and freedom. It can get confusing reading through here as to who is being addressed in vs. 12-15. First he addresses Judah in vs. 12-13, then the king of Assyria in vs. 14, then back to Judah in vs. 15 as we'll see in our final point this morning.

The purpose of this prophecy was to encourage the people of Judah with a promise of hope. Remember, even though Nineveh's destruction is the main focus of this letter, it was not written to them, it was written to God's people. Why? Because they needed to know that the midst of all the chaos that "The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him." (Nah. 1:7)

As Nahum encouraged the people of Judah, he clarifies the source of his message, saying, "Thus says the LORD" in vs. 12. This is the call of every true prophet of God. It's an affirmation that he spoke on God's behalf. It is not just his opinion, it is the truth, spoken directly from God, and as such, it would come to pass because the LORD is faithful to his promises. And the words he used to encourage the people are these, "Though they (the Assyrians) are at full strength and many, they will be cut down and pass away."

The verb translated as "cut down" literally means to shear an animal and the verb "pass away" means to disappear. The idea conveyed here is that the Ninevites would experience total destruction and would literally vanish from the face of the earth. Although they were strong and numerous, neither their strength nor their numbers would help them in the day of God's judgment.

But the destruction of Nineveh would mean deliverance and hope for Judah. Through the prophet, the LORD declared at the end of vs. 12, "Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more." God told his covenant people that their punishment would soon be over. The LORD had used the Assyrian empire as his instrument to discipline Israel and Judah. But, in their arrogance, the Assyrians went beyond their assignment. God would now judge them to avenge the blood of his people. In so doing, he would free Judah from the hand of the Assyrians.

That the nation of Judah would be free from the Assyrian oppression is evident from the next statement in which the LORD stated in vs. 13, [read]. A yoke is a straight bar made of wood. It allowed two or more draft animals to be coupled together to plow effectively. The bonds spoken of here were the leather straps that held the yoke to the neck of the animal. To "break the yoke" and "burst the bonds" is to free the animal from having to plow.

The LORD used this image to describe the oppression the people of Judah had suffered at the hand of Assyria. In essence, the LORD is saying that he would end Assyria's power over Judah to give his people their freedom once again.

Then, the LORD turns his attention to the king of Assyria in vs. 14. He says, "The LORD has given commandment about you." This statement means that the LORD had decreed a message concerning Nineveh. And it's in three parts. In the first part, the LORD said, "No more shall your name be perpetuated," meaning the LORD would wipe out the Assyrians to prevent them from having descendants to carry on the family name, so to speak.

In the second part, the LORD declared, "from the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the metal image," in other words, your idols and false gods. Instead of bringing shame to the Lord by defeating his people, God would fight on Judah's behalf. Simply stated, God would destroy all the idols that were in the temples of the Assyrian gods for they are nothing.

And in the third part, the LORD said, "I will make your grave, for you are vile." The reason God would destroy the Assyrians and bury them, so to speak, is spelled out in the

last part of the verse, “for you are vile.” The word “vile” can also be translated as “contemptible” which can mean in the original language something light or insignificant.

So, although the Assyrians dominated the world as a powerful empire, they were insignificant in the eyes of God. They were only interested in exploiting others. Therefore, he would cut them off and throw them in the grave prepared he for them.

And finally, this morning we are given in these verses the words of promise that evil being defeated. In vs. 15, Nahum is inspired to tell Judah that there was one coming bringing good news, and proclaiming peace, and who would bring peace by working new life in Judah so that they could fulfil their vows to God. This is a repetition of the words put into the mouth of Isaiah in Isa. 52:7 where we read 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion ‘Your God reigns!’

In ancient times, before cell phones and internet, messengers were sent to spread the news about the battles that were won or lost. Here, Nahum uses the illustration to point to the assurance of God's victory over his enemies, that one day they one would come and bring this good news to his people that they were free from their captivity.

This was given as a message of hope and comfort to Judah. Ultimately, its a prophecy of the coming of Christ, to be the Savior of sinners. Jesus came with the true and effective message of peace and good news, and to work a work of all-sufficient salvation for all those given him by the Father for eternal salvation.

For all of us who have been granted the gift of true repentance and faith in Jesus as our Lord, God and Savior the words of Nahum resonate with the conviction of our hearts. Jesus gave this peace to his disciples and to us, where through his mighty work of redemption in his dying on the cross to be the once for all payment for our sins, we have peace with God. Our sin is covered by the righteousness of Christ. Our guilt is taken away and we know and experience the truth of Paul's declaration in Romans 8:1 where we read, “Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Christ is the great one fulfilling completely the inspired prophetic words of Nahum. In Christ evil is expelled forever and completely. Blessed are those who follow after him. In all that these verses reveal, we see the goodness of the Lord being worked out, both in the blessing of the redeemed, and in God upholding his righteousness in victory over his enemies. Let's pray.

Benediction: “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 5:10-11)