

Nahum 1

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Date: 17 July 2016

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[0 : 00] Is what comforts you bigger than what scares you in life?

! There was nothing so terrible, nothing so threatening, nothing so real, so overwhelming, such an all-consuming force as Nineveh, the city of Nineveh. Just say that word, Nineveh, and you're talking about a place, you're talking about something that most people in Nahum's time would want to forget, they'd want to ignore it. But Nineveh, he goes straight for the kind of elephant in the room, doesn't he, in verse 1, he tells us it's an oracle concerning Nineveh.

Nahum gets straight to the problem at the beginning of this book, straight to the issue on everyone's minds, the city that is the capital of Assyria, the great empire of the north of the known world. It's brought kings to its knees, and it's brought Judah almost to its knees.

Nineveh is at the centre of the world's greatest war machine. Later on in the book we read chapter 3, verse 1, a bit of a description of Nineveh.

It was notorious throughout the world. If you look to the end of the whole book, in verse 19 of chapter 3, it says, For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil. It was notorious, the most delinquent power on earth. It's like a rogue nation with nuclear arms.

[2 : 06] Like sort of ISIS or something like that on a grand scale. This is Nineveh in Nahum's day. And Nahum sees Nineveh on the horizon. Assyria is on the borders of the northern tribes. Nineveh moves closely.

And it's already annexed, the northern tribes of Israel. And remember there are no Geneva conventions, there's no NATO, there's no UN, to protect you from Nineveh, from Assyria. It is a loose cannon in the world, and no one could stop her. That is Nahum's context.

So if I told you actually that the name Nahum means comfort, you might be a little bit surprised. The word Nahum, it means comfort or consolation. That is what this book is about.

And you think, well what comfort can there be against this? Against the Nineveh of the world and of our lives.

Maybe you're saying that about something in your life now. Some dark thing. Some dark fear looming right now. And you're thinking, well what can comfort me against this?

[3 : 26] There are Christians over the world, aren't they, who are asking that question. What can comfort me against this? So can what comforts you be bigger than what scares you?

Wouldn't it be great, wouldn't it be great if our comforts were bigger than our fears? And that is what Nahum wants to tell the people of Judah at this time.

He wants to give them a message of comfort in the face of Nineveh. There are three things here that he gives them to comfort them. Firstly, the God of judgment is our comfort.

The God of judgment is our comfort. In the first eight verses which we're going to look at really tonight of this book, the form of the language is poetry.

It's a kind of poem that Nahum gives them. It's a kind of comfort poem. One that you might get on the inside of a card. But what sort of poem is it? How does it begin?

[4 : 30] Roses are red, violets are blue, that kind of thing. It isn't, is it? Look how it starts in verse 2. The Lord is a jealous and avenging God.

Verse 2. He speaks about God's wrath. In verse 2. He goes on in this poem giving us graphic pictures of God's retribution.

Talks about the heat of his anger, doesn't he? How comforting does that sound, do you think? You know, the idea of a God who judges, a God who is jealous, a God who does all of these things, he's wrathful, he avenges, is not something that we would automatically think it comforts us.

It's not something that we would want to think about very much. It's not a popular thing to think about, is it? But actually it is the kind of comfort you need when all of the comforts are just not big

enough.

And it's what tiny little Judah needs as it looks to this impending doom coming from the north, from Assyria.

[5 : 41] They need the kind of comfort that will be bigger than the thing that scares them. So that is his first point. There is a God of judgment. Verse 2.

He is a jealous and avenging God. Avenging. Avenging. That word comes up three times in verse 2, doesn't it? He's jealous. He's avenging. Is that a good description?

Is that a comforting description? Is jealousy a good thing, we might think? Jealousy so often controls us, doesn't it? It can flare up at any moment.

It just rises up in us. And it's so ugly, isn't it, when jealousy takes hold of us. Maybe you know somebody like that. Someone in the workplace. And they just can't take criticism.

They can't handle it when someone else does better than them. They get jealous. And it's so ugly at times when it masters us. But God's jealousy is not like that.

[6 : 41] God isn't mastered by jealousy. He is the master of jealousy. It's his controlled, settled, clean need.

His jealousy to see goodness win. And evil destroyed. And evil destroyed. It's his settled desire to see himself as the only good in all of the universe, honoured.

And all other pretenders to his throne destroyed. It's his controlled, righteous jealousy. And he is the God of judgment because he can't stand evil.

He says, I won't share my glory with anybody else. I just won't do that. And I'm jealous that my goodness wins. And is seen. And so the God of judgment is our comfort, Nahum says, because we need a God who is jealous for justice, don't we?

I don't know if you've been following the story of the Hillsborough inquest. Back in April, the longest legal inquest in British history ended. 27 years.

[7 : 50] 96 people lost their lives in the Hillsborough disaster. And in that final inquest hearing, the families of the victims went, didn't they? And they got the verdict they were longing for.

The jury passed the verdict. The victims were unlawfully killed. And the banner outside of the courtroom had one word on it. Justice. Justice.

The tweets pulled in. Justice at last for the 96. Justice, finally. Justice has been served. And we long for justice, don't we? Often we think our society has lost its moral compass.

But we've never been so thirsty for justice. We long for justice against child abuse. Against tax evaders. Against spending scandals.

Against terrorism. We long for justice. And here is the God who is jealous for justice. He's jealous for his own goodness. And the comfort for God's people faced with the Ninevehs of this world.

[8 : 53] Is that although nothing is happening now. God will act. He is the God who judges. And he will deliver justice. Nothing seems to happen, does he?

But in verse 2. It says that he keeps wrath. For his enemies. Keeps it back. For them.

And he will do this in person, won't he? If you look at verse 3. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power. And the Lord will by no means clear the guilty.

It's a courtroom scene there. And the Lord himself sits in the judge's chair. And there are no clever lawyers who can kind of weasel out of the truth.

He'll come in person as judge. And the guilty will be found out. He'll deliver justice. Now verse 3 is familiar, isn't it?

[9 : 51] I don't know if you recognise verse 3. The Lord is slow to anger. Great in power. It's a quote from Exodus 20. Where God speaks his character.

He says, Now what is interesting about that quote there from Exodus is Nahum admits the last bit, doesn't he?

He leaves the bit out about steadfast love and mercy on this occasion. I don't know if you can remember the other book where Nineveh is mentioned.

It's Jonah, isn't it? That's kind of like Act 1 and this is sort of Act 2. Nineveh is given mercy in the book of Jonah, isn't it? Jonah preaches.

Probably one of the shortest sermons in the Bible. 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed. And they all turn. They all repent. He preaches a message of judgment.

[11 : 04] And they all turn and are saved. So it's not that God has it in for Nineveh in particular. He is merciful to them. But there does come a time when enough is enough.

With God. There is a line. And eventually Nineveh that keeps rebelling against God. This mercy will be cut off from them.

And Nahum says that that time is about to arrive. He says to God's people. Listen, they won't get away with it. They won't get away with it. God will deliver justice.

On their enemies. On his enemies. And that's a great comfort. For them. You see, there may be nothing happening now. But God's persecuted people. His church.

Will one day be vindicated. God's people who are threatened. Today. With distress. And persecution. And danger. And nakedness. And famine.

[12:08] And sword. As Paul says. Justice will come. For them. And that's the wonderful image. At the end of the Bible. In Revelation 19. Isn't it? The image of a great multitude of people.

Singing there. In celebration. Hallelujah. Salvation and glory. Power. Belong to our God. Why? For his judgments.

Are true and just. God is a God of comfort. Because he is the judging God. God. And so there is a world. Where evil will be dealt with finally.

Where sin will be dealt with. Where death will end. Where truly God's people will be able to hold the banner. Outside of the courtroom.

Justice. At last. So Nahum gives them this vision of a God who is judge. And it's a comfort greater than what scares them.

[13:05] At this time. The God of comfort. A God of judgment. Is our comfort. Secondly though. The scale and power.

Of God's judgment. Is our comfort. So is what comforts you bigger than what scares you? Well I guess to answer that question. Really it's a question of scale.

Isn't it? What sort of scale are you using? I was reading on Wikipedia. The other day. One of the biggest storms to ever hit the US. Was Typhoon Tip.

In 1979. Strange name isn't it? Which stretched from New York. To Dallas. It's about 1400 miles long.

Now if you measure that out. It's about the same distance from here. To Athens. It's massive. One of the biggest storms ever recorded. I think of the scale of that.

[14:04] I just can't get my head around that. But I guess it depends on what sort of measure you use. Doesn't it? So let's put something that big.

Something that scary. On Nahum's scale. On God's scale. Just look at verse 3. Half way through. His way.

Is in whirlwind and storm. And the clouds are the dust. Of his feet. Storm Tip. Storm Tip. In God's eyes.

You don't need a map. You need a microscope. To see that. Don't you? Do you get a sense of scale here? The great storms that we see on the TV screens.

The storms of nature. Are like dust. On the bottom of God's shoes. On his feet. He is a God who judges.

[15:03] And the scariest things. Are like dust to him. And he controls them. He paddles around in the clouds. The whirlwind and the storms.

Belong to him. The whirlwind and the storms. They are a picture. Of what goes on in between heaven and earth. Aren't they?

In that kind of realm. They're pictures of stuff. That goes on when heaven. The power of heaven. Touches the earth. And affects the earth. In history.

In space. And in time. And so this is the scale. Of his judgment. The power of heaven. Will come. To earth.

Justice will come on earth. If you've ever seen those storm chasers. On TV. They go around. Don't they? Trying to find the biggest storm.

[15:56] To get as closely to it. As they can to record it. And the problem is. That they never know. Where the next storm is going to be. Or where it's going to go. They don't know the direction.

Storms and whirlwinds. Are arbitrary things. They're random things. Aren't they? But even the randomness of storms.

Is under God's control. His way is in the whirlwind. He turns the randomness of nature. Into his control force. For judgment.

And so you see the scale. Of God's judgment. See its power. Mayhem gets so graphic. In this chapter.

Its devastating power. He rebukes the sea. He dries up the rivers. And it might help you to know. That the city of Nineveh.

[16:51] Was built in such a way. That its defences. And its life. Depended on water channels. It was built on the eastern bank. Of the river Tigris. And it depended on the constant flow of water.

For life and defence. And Nahum here. He remembers doesn't he. The time of the drying of the Red Sea. Where God rescued the Israelites. It's where he punishes God's enemies.

The Egyptians. And he's done it before. And he's going to do it again. It's the power and scale. Of God's judgment. Verse 5.

The mountains melt. The hills melt. The earth heaves. The whole world. Will be shaken. Granite will melt.

Like a sandcastle on the beach. Colossians says. Of the Lord Jesus. That he holds all things together. And all he has to do. Is let go for a second.

[17:52] Isn't it? And the earth would disintegrate. To melt like hot dripping wax. And so Nahum asks the question. Nobody can answer.

Verse 6. Who can endure it? Who can stand before his indignation? He asks it once doesn't he? And he asks it again. Let me ask that again. Who can endure the heat of his anger? Who can stand before his indignation?

Because this is the scale. And the power of God's wrath poured out. God's wrath. That's another no-no too.

Isn't it? Is that a comforting description? Wrath? It's not a nice thing. Is it? To think about. Wrath again. It so often controls us.

[18:46] Wrath. It quickly masters us. It's an ugly thing. When people fly off the handle. In wrath. Isn't it? With a sort of knee jerk reaction. And irrational anger.

But again. That's not the wrath of God here. We're often mastered by wrath. But God is master of wrath. He masters it. And he expresses it.

And it's under control. And it's righteous. And it's good. And so you see. What is ugly in our hands. Is safe in his hands.

And it's good in his hands. That's why God says to us. Yes you can be jealous for justice. You can be jealous for my glory. But vengeance is mine. I will repay.

Because he is not mastered by wrath. He is master over it. And so Nahum gives them the comfort of a God. Who judges. On a biblical scale.

[19:45] The clouds of the dust of his feet. So is what comforts you bigger than what scares you. I hope that maybe you can start to answer that question.

God's people facing the Ninevehs of life. Of this world. They need comfort like this. The God of judgment. That no evil will stand up against it.

But thirdly and lastly. Nahum speaks of God's tenderness. In his judgment. He is a God who judges. With great scale and power. And yet his judgment is tender. If you were trying. If you were trying. If you were trying to. Trying to rid the world.

Of all evil. I wonder how you'd do that. Kind of miss world thing isn't it. World peace. How would you achieve world peace.

[20:41] I guess you could start by making sure. That no more evil people existed. Couldn't you? Could you work out who might give birth.

To the next Hitler. It would be difficult wouldn't it? The problem is that. By wishing for world peace. Actually what you're asking for. Is no more children.

Isn't it? You're asking for the human race. To be wiped out. You're asking for another flood. And as we think about the scale.

And power of God's judgment. I wonder if there was a sense of. Slight discomfort there. Because the problem. Isn't just out there. Is it?

When we cry for justice. We call upon judgment. Call judgment upon ourselves. To. Of the evils.

[21:40] That we have committed. The evil thoughts. And the evil. Inclinations of our hearts. You know. In verse 4. There are three places mentioned.

I don't know if you noticed those. In verse 4. Bashan. And Carmel wither. The bloom of Lebanon. Withers. Surprising thing about those places.

Is that they are in Israel. You see. In his judgment. God is impartial. He judges his people here. Doesn't he? Just by having the privilege. Of living in the land. It does not protect you. From his judgment. He is impartial in his judgment. So you can endure his indignation. That's the question. Can you? Well I hope that you can say yes. Tonight. Have a look at verse 7. [22 : 39] The Lord is good. A stronghold. In the day of trouble. The question that nobody can answer. In verse 6. Does have an answer. There is a yes. To verse 6. Because whilst God's judgment. Consumes. It also rescues. There is a place to go. To flee in the danger. And the comfort is. That the one place you go. To avoid the wrath of God. Is to go to God. It's an odd thing. He won't be mastered. By his wrath. But actually. He masters. His wrath. In the Lord Jesus Christ. His only son. His wrath. His anger. Is mastered. And poured out. [23 : 32] It is controlled. And measured. In all of its full fury. Upon him. At the cross. And Jesus willingly. Takes that. Wrath that we deserve. All of that. Mountain melting. Storm brewing. Quaking vengeance. Of God. Is mastered upon him. There. And so. When God delivers justice. At the cross. He delivers justice. For his people. Not upon his people. That's the difference. Isn't it? And he delivers vengeance. For his people. Not upon his people. There. And in that moment. On the cross. Judgment comes. On the earth. And God comes. In person. And Jesus holds. The banner. Outside of the courtroom. And it reads. Justice. And he shouts. It is finished. [24 : 28] And vengeance. Is given. For us. Not upon us. And all. Who take refuge. In him. Have a stronghold. In the day of trouble. It is a fearful. Terrible judgment. Nahum. Warns of here. Isn't it? But it does not. Have to be on you. It can be for you. So. Can what comforts you. Be bigger than what. Scares you. Tonight. Nahum. Calls the people. To look at the God. Who is judge. The powerful judge. The tender judge. Who gives them. A stronghold. And when. What is not safe. Safe in our hands. This wrath. Is safe. In God's hands. His wrath. Is poured out. On evil. And it is because. That God. [25 : 21] Deals with evil. In the end. That justice. Will be done. And it will be delivered. In this world. And so. You have nothing. To fear. From Nineveh. From the Ninevehs. Of this world. From the Ninevehs. Of your life. The turmoil. Of the world. At the moment. It is. It is pretty unusual. Actually. Isn't it? It is a real worry. For some. But nothing. On the world stage. Is big enough. To stand. Against God's judgment. And his justice. Which will come. And we are thankful. Aren't we? That it will come. For us. But not upon us. Because we have a stronghold. In the day of trouble. Let's pray. Together.