

Nahum 3

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[0 : 00] What do you think it would take for you to break out into spontaneous applause? For me it would! take a lot because I'm English and I don't like doing that kind of thing and it doesn't! happen often does it real true spontaneous heartfelt applause if you've started watching! Strictly commiseration.

But there is a standing ovation every 10 minutes on Strictly isn't there? And as the weeks go by that just means less and less and less. I'm talking about the applause of something wonderfully meaningful, something personal, something full of deep significance that has happened to you in your life. It is the kind of applause that maybe you might hear in the odd situation of a courtroom from relieved victims in a prosecutor's court. It is the moment when the judge turns and addresses the murderer or the abuser or the fraudster. And he gives that final sentence doesn't he? That statement. And it is good. It is what the victims have longed for through this long drawn out trial. Maybe you've seen scenes like that on TV. There is that moment isn't there where the victims physically collapse in that moment isn't there where the victims are going to be in a crowd. It comes from that deep place of longing for justice. And there is that sudden release in a shout, in a cry, in the sudden loss of inhibitions, in tears, in the clapping of hands. That is the kind of applause that I'm talking about.

Nahum chapter 3. It won't come to you as a surprise that the end of the chapter shows us where we're going tonight in verse 19, just over the page.

It is a scene of spontaneous applause, of clapping at the final judgment of a crooked and cruel enemy. God the judge addresses the enemy in the dock. There is no easing your hurt. Your wound is grievous. All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you.

[2 : 37] For upon whom has not come your unseating evil? Nahum, at the end of this prophecy, wants the people of God to visualise in their minds this moment. In all of their worries and in all of their fears about their enemies attacking them, this is the moment where their great enemy will be judged.

And they will join together as applause breaks out. And if you've missed the last few weeks as we've gone through Nahum, the context of the prophecy is the destruction of Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria.

And we've read about God's judgment on this great adversary of his people who live in Judah. We've seen that kingdoms rise and fall, but God lasts forever as judge.

But the good news of Nahum is not limited to one geographical place in Judah at one particular time in history. It is for all of the nations forever.

The applause that Judah will engage in will be enjoyed by all of the nations forever. You may have noticed that this chapter has got an international feel to it.

[3 : 51] If you look at verse 4, the nations have been betrayed by this enemy. The peoples, verse 5, again, the nations, the kingdoms, will look at the shame of this enemy.

Verse 7, all who look at you will shrink away. And verse 19, all who hear the news clap their hands. This is not an all without exception, but it's an all in the sense of every kind of person, every kind of nation.

Every kind of person will engage in this applause. There's an international feel about this, isn't there? And history tells us that Nahum was fulfilled very quickly in history when Nineveh was destroyed by Babylon.

We know that happened. But that was a picture of a much greater judgment of eternal and universal relevance to all of the nations of the world.

It is a picture of the moment when the figure who is at the centre of all of the suffering of the world will be judged by God forever and punished. It is ultimately a picture of the final judgment of the devil, who we've already met in this book, haven't we?

[5 : 08] He's called the worthless counsellor in chapter 1. So just think of that moment. Think of that moment in your life.

Nahum says it is going to happen in the end. When somebody who hates you with a deep hatred that you cannot imagine, somebody who has stalked you all of your life, somebody who is hell-bent on destroying you will be removed forever by a judge, and you will rejoice.

And in that moment you will have something truly wonderful to clap about and to shout about. This is the comfort of Nahum. So I want to go through this chapter as if it was a court case, to see the crime, the sentence, and finally the relief afterwards.

Firstly, the crime. The crime of this great enemy is the betrayal of the nations. And when victims lose their inhibitions in that way, and collapse with emotion, it's usually because somebody has damaged or destroyed another human being, isn't it?

That is the worst kind of crime imaginable. And the sin and the crime of Nineveh is that it has defrauded and abused and destroyed and betrayed human beings.

[6 : 37] Just look at verse 4. It is an incredible verse.

Here is Nahum on the brink of national disaster, with Assyria, this great power, on the doorstep. And you hope he is not foreign secretary here. But the message that he gives them is pretty clear, isn't it?

He says, You whore! You whore! You prostitute! In the business of deception and temptation and manipulation.

He calls Assyria a prostitute. Now she is not the victim of a bad run in life, which can often be the case. Not this time.

No, she is cunning. She is wily. She is savvy. She is graceful. Isn't she? Verse 4. She looks good.

[7 : 39] She is outwardly attractive. She is full of charms. But they are deadly charms. She betrays the nations with her charms.

The word charms there, it can mean sorcery or witchcraft. It's as if she has cast a spell over the world. And she lures victims in by titillating their senses for pleasure.

She gives them a taste of pleasure. She offers them the glories of some sensuality of the moment. But it's all betrayal. Assyria, she is like the white witch from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. She lures in, doesn't she, with a taste of Turkish delight. It's Peter, isn't it, I think. But actually she's led into the cold dungeon.

She imprisons with false hopes and lies and fleeting pleasures. And this is what Nehiva is like to the nations. And this is how they did it in history.

[8 : 45] This is totally accurate. The promise of pleasure and riches. Power to anyone who gave allegiance to them. And then when they finally took over the nation, they imposed tribute and slavery.

It's like mafia protection money, isn't it? You pay us and we'll protect you. But actually all along you're paying for protection from them, aren't you?

It was a regime fueled by sorcery and idolatry and witchcraft. And it sucked the nations in and destroyed them as they willingly came.

And the more you see that, the more you recognize the one behind that kind of thing. Because temptation and betrayal and lies are the work of the devil, the worthless counselor.

And their crimes are a picture of his crimes against humanity. Chapter 3, it opens up in such a vivid verse, doesn't it? Verse 1.

[9 : 50] Woe to the bloody city. All full of lies and plunder. No end to their prey. You can read that. It's, oh, the bloody city. It's just an exclamation of how difficult it is to even look at Nineveh.

And what has been going on there? It is so horrible to look at, you can barely take it in. This is Nineveh. This is Satan's city.

He's mastered the art of wily seduction, the art of wickedness. He tempts with beauty. He tempts with the promise of pleasure. And that is what temptation is, isn't it?

It is the false, alluring pleasure that sin seems to offer. Sin is pleasurable, isn't it, for a time. That is why it's tempting.

But in the end, it leads to shame and destruction and death. He is tireless. He is unrelenting. His sole aim is to destroy human beings with his charms, with his doctrine, with his distractions.
[10 : 56] And his domination. And he's betrayed the nations. So the applause at his downfall will be real and it will be spontaneous.

And we won't shed a tear for him. It's a really bloody description of the fall of Nineveh in verse 2 and 3, isn't it? It's so graphic. It describes the aftermath of Nineveh's downfall.

And as if one description of fatality wasn't enough. In verse 3 he gives us three. The slain, the corpse, the dead bodies. The descriptions are lurid and horrific, aren't they?

We sort of think, are they over the top? But they're not over the top. They're not over the top to Judah, who have seen how bad Assyria is. When you realise how evil they have been.

This is right. And when you realise how evil Satan is. The punishment fits the crime. That is because to damage another human being is the worst thing.

[12 : 04] It is to damage the image of the glory of God in the world. It's to deface and destroy that which best represents him in the world. Human beings are crowned as representations of the glory of God made in his image.

And here Satan dares to graffiti over that image. To pour scorn on God's goodness and glory. And to destroy the nations.

And so this is the crime of Nineveh. It is the appalling sin of Satan to leave the nations. To disfigure and mar the image of God.

Through temptation in the world. That is the crime. And let me just say that he is still at it today. Gloriously, we know that the devil has been defeated.

The victory has been won at the cross of the Lord Jesus. But we still await his final punishment, don't we? And this is still how he operates. He does it to God's people.

[13 : 14] Do you know, to become a Christian especially is to have Satan as your enemy. If you're not a Christian here tonight, maybe you are thinking, Do you know, I don't feel this.

I don't feel like Satan is my enemy. Let me say, if you're not a Christian here tonight, If you're not trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, Then the only enemy you have is God. And that is far worse.

But when you become a Christian, It is as if all of the enemies switch around. Isn't it? Because God, who was your enemy, becomes your father.

And you become his beloved child. He becomes your shepherd. And your friend. And suddenly all of God's enemies become your enemies. The world, the flesh, sin and Satan, They all become your enemies.

Because they are his enemies. And the Christian life is the difference between having God as an enemy, Or having Satan as an enemy. And so you know, he may not be able to keep you out of heaven, But he will try and keep heaven out of you.

[14 : 24] He'll entice you. He'll hinder your spiritual discipline. He'll misrepresent God and his word to you. He will oppose your sanctification. He loves a worldly Christian.

That is why James says, Resist the devil. And he will flee from you. We're given the armour of God, aren't we? In Ephesians 6. That is his crime.

To tempt and betray and to destroy human beings. So I wonder if you can feel the applause rising up in your heart.

As we think about this sentence that is going to be passed. That is the second thing. The sentence. The sentence is that he will become a spectacle for the nations.

He will become a spectacle for the nations. The story was in the news recently about a judge in Italy. Who was involved in a case against some members of the mafia. They were regarded as some of the most dangerous mob bosses.

[15 : 28] They were at the top of the criminal chain. But actually most people were sceptical that the judge would even turn up. So the trial. Because previous cases the judges have just disappeared.

I guess the mafia have friends in high places. Don't they? But the sceptics were proved wrong when this judge. Roberto Arnaldi. Gave a combined sentence of a thousand years.

For the mob bosses. You see it was a shock. Because where others had failed to step up. He had the authority and the power to administer justice.

And to lay it down. And afterwards their faces were published. In the local papers. It was a kind of mob boss offenders register I guess. And here is a God who is not afraid to lay down the law on

Nineveh.

He is not threatened. He doesn't have to think about repercussions. Or revenge attacks. And he will expose all of their work for everyone to see.

[16:31] Now that is what we get in verse 5 to 7 isn't it? Nineveh is marked out and exposed. The operation will be uncovered. Verse 5.

I will lift your skirts over your face. It's a sort of seed of shame isn't it? The whoredom and all this deception will be exposed.

It's like some sort of back of office drug stem. But is exposed to the nations around them. The nations will look at their nakedness.

Verse 5. It's utter humiliation isn't it? C.S. Lewis said the one thing the devil can't stand is to be mocked. And here God says I will throw filth at you.

I will mock you out. I will expose your work for what it is. And the pretense and the deception will not work anymore on my people.

[17:31] That the pretend piety, that the gracefulness, the pleasantness will be revealed for what it is. And temptation crucially will lose its power.

The perfume and the jewels and the graces of the devil won't wash. The devil will lose his link's effect.

God says I will make you a spectacle. This is the end of temptation. And the battle with sin for God's people. Imagine that day. There will be something haunting about this exposure won't there in verse 7.

People will shrink from you. And they will say wasted is Nineveh. There will be something unpalatable about this in a sense. It is not an applause of vengeance or of vindictiveness.

The nations will watch in horror as this punishment unfolds. And yet, no one will grieve for her.

Verse 7. No one will grieve for Nineveh.

[18:36] It will be terrible. But no one in that moment will find it in themselves to weep for Nineveh. And they will all agree that this judgement is right and it's long overdue.

And the great enemy of the human race, Satan, will be exposed and made a spectacle of. And it will be a terrible, terrible day. But we will not shed a tear for him.

We won't weep for him. We won't feel sorry for him. We will clap our hands in relief. It's a simple message tonight really.

But in your temptations and in your struggles and in your battles with sin. As you feel the enemy at times very close to you. Just imagine this moment before it happens.

It is going to happen in the end. When someone who hates you and deeply wants to destroy you will be removed forever by a judge. And you will rejoice.

[19:37] And in that moment you will have something to clap about and to shout about. Verse 5 is where God addresses Nineveh, isn't it?

Behold, I am against you. And it begins at quite a large section which goes to the end of the prophecy. We haven't got time to go through all of the details now.

But I just want you to notice the rhetorical questions that God asks Nineveh. It's as if God is speaking to Nineveh while they are being punished.

And it's almost as if God is speaking to the devil at his final punishment. And he asks these rhetorical questions. They're not questions that he needs an answer to.

But they're for the purpose of the nations around listening in, aren't they? Verse 7, there's the first question. Where shall I seek comforters for you?

[20:34] It's a rhetorical question. The answer is there is no comfort. There are no comforters. His punishment will have no comfort. There will be no reprieve.

There will be no pleasantries. There will be no phone call. No privileges. No rewards for good behaviour. The devil's punishment. It will be altogether awful.

It will be without comfort. Verse 8. Are you better than Thebes? As you read through this section, what you have is the story of Thebes.

It was a great city. Which, funnily enough, the Assyrians had conquered before. But the point is that Thebes was almost exactly a replica of Nineveh.

But better. So it had the same water defences in verse 8. Water was her wall. It had the same power by taking nations under its grip and using them.

[21 : 36] Verse 9. Kush. Egypt. Put. Libya. But she was almost miraculously invaded and defeated by Assyria. Verse 10. They were exiled.

They were taken off into slavery. And the point is, listen Nineveh, if it happened to them, who were greater than you, how could you not think that it would happen to you? How could you not think that the destruction you have done would not end upon your own heads as you dashed infants into pieces? How could you not think that a God of justice would not react to that? How could you not think that to destroy and deface human beings would result in your own destruction? I am God. And these people are made in my image. You had to expect this. Nineveh. Satan. Because last question.

[22 : 33] Verse 19. On whom has not come your unceasing evil? This shaming. Total unceasing punishment is for your unceasing evil.

Which has touched every corner of the world. So the crime. The sentence. Spectacle for the nations. And we get a taste of this in the Gospels, don't we?

In the Gospels we read of God himself coming and bringing judgment upon Satan. God takes on human flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as the seed of a woman who will crush Satan's head.

As a fulfilment of that promise in Genesis 3. And early in the Gospels Jesus meets Satan head on, doesn't he? And he is very aware that his days are numbered.

Mark chapter 1. That the demons, the servants of Satan say, have you come to destroy us? They meet Jesus. They know that is the inevitable outcome.

[23 : 41] The demons in Luke 8. They beg Jesus not to throw them into the abyss. In Jesus, here is one who has authority and power to lay down the law on Satan.

And his workers. And he's been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He's been sat at the right hand of God. Jesus speaks in Matthew 25 of a lake of fire.

An eternal lake of fire prepared for Satan. And so Jesus is not a judge who fears reprisals or revenge attacks. He's the one who in the end will expose Satan and render his temptations ineffective.

And will make him a spectacle for the nations. The crime, the sentence. Thirdly, the relief. The applause among the nations. The applause among the nations.

You know, it's fitting, isn't it, that a child can go down to the British Museum and buy a pencil case or a rubber or a key ring with a picture of the Assyrian lions on it.

[24 : 50] The Assyrian lions that towered at the gates of Nineveh and put the fear of God into the people around them.

The great trophies of Assyrian power are now available in a school bag near you. Items sold separately. History shows, doesn't it, that Nahum was right.

Kingdoms rise and fall but God lasts forever as judge. And the people of Judah could never have imagined of a time when Nineveh was not. But the time eventually came.

The history books tell us that so great was the destruction of Nineveh. That it took another 1500 years before archaeologists could find its exact location.

It was literally buried in the sands of time. It was totally forgotten from the face of the earth. But that wasn't just for then.

[25 : 50] And it wasn't just for God's people then. It was to be forever for all the nations. As the promise of a final and permanent punishment.

And destruction of Satan from this world. And the Lord Jesus Christ, the one whom the Father has made judge of all things, will pass his sentence and will punish the devil.

And the sentence it will be good. And it will be what we've longed for. John tells us what that would be like on that day, doesn't he?

In Revelation chapter 19. Maybe you could just turn there with me. Revelation chapter 19. It's on page 1039. This is the scene in that moment.

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven. Crying out. Hallelujah. Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. For his judgments are true and just.

[26 : 52] For he has judged the great prostitute. Who corrupted the earth with her immorality. And has avenged on her the blood of his servants. Once more they cried out.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. It will be a terrible day. That God's people will not shed a single tear.

Because we'll have something truly wonderful to clap. Truly wonderful to shout about. And the Christian life is the difference between having God as an enemy. And having Satan as an enemy. And if you've got God as an enemy tonight. You need to sort that out. You need to do what Nahum says in chapter 1 verse 7. Go to the stronghold in the day of trouble.

Because the Lord is good. But if you've got Satan as an enemy. Then Nahum says you've made the right choice. Because the day will come when the devil's scheming and plotting and betraying will be seen for what it is.

[27 : 58] And temptation will lose its allure and power. And all of the nations will celebrate his final punishment. And Jesus will do it.

So we've got to wait haven't we for that time. We've got to resist the devil. For behold. The great verse.

The famous verse of chapter 1 verse 15. Behold upon the mountains the feet of him who brings good news. Who publishes peace. Keep your feasts so due to fulfil your vows.

For never again shall the worthless pass through you. He is utterly cut off. And that truly is something to clap and shout about.

Amen.