

Text: Nahum 1:1-8 (Pew Bible pg.926)

Title: “God is Good and Angry”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to Nahum 1:7-8 (Pew Bible pg.926). We’ve been exploring in a part of our Bibles that many don’t typically read, much less study. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that these books were written to people long ago, and we have nothing to learn from them. In fact, we have everything to learn from them. In many ways it’s like we’re reading right off the front page of the newspaper or your favorite news website. I want to begin by reading Nahum 1:7-8. These two verses are really a good summary of the entire book of Nahum. Read text.

The title of my message today is “God is Good and Angry.” When I say He is “good and angry” I don’t mean it in the sense that we see it in ourselves or in other people ... you know, like “Dad is good and mad.” We’ve seen the ugly side of that in ourselves and in others. Maybe you struggle with that kind of uncontrolled temper that blows up on others. Or maybe you struggle with the passive/aggressive kind that smiles on the outside, but deep inside you seethe with anger all the time.

ILLUSTRATION - It may be a little confusing to you that we speak about God being good and angry. In C. S. Lewis’s book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the children, Peter, Susan and Lucy, are told by the Beavers about Aslan, who represents Christ in the story. The children are about to meet Aslan and they become quite nervous when they learn that he is a lion:

QUOTE: “Is – is he a man?” asked Lucy. “Aslan a man!” said Mr. Beaver sternly. “Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don’t you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion, the Lion, the great Lion.” “Ooh,” said Susan, “I thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.” “That you will, dearie, and make no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.” “Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy. “Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the king I tell you.”

One of the hardest things for us to reconcile in our minds is how God can be both good and angry. The prophecies of Nahum help us see that God blends goodness and anger or wrath in a perfect way.

If we go back to Nahum 1:1 we get some valuable information.

Nahum 1:1 - An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

Now an oracle is a song. And in this case it is a very unique song. The book begins with an acrostic poem or hymn. That means that each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So it’s very creative poetry.

But the word “oracle” also means “burden.” There’s a problem in the world and it is a burden that God has put on the heart of His prophet. It is a weighty message because it announces an impending disaster on the great city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

Remember our study of the prophets began with the book of Jonah, which many OT scholars believe is the earliest of the prophetic books. Assyria was the great power in that region of the world for about 200 years. The capital city of Nineveh, located near the present day city of Mosul, Iraq, was one of the grandest and most powerful cities on earth. It was surrounded by massive impressive walls. But it was also the capital of one of the cruelest, vilest, most powerful, and most idolatrous empires in world history.

Jonah preached there about 100 years before Nahum’s time. You’ll recall that when Jonah preached there the inhabitants of that pagan city repented and God spared them. But now more than a 100 years later the Assyrians are back on the warpath. So the Assyrians repented at one point; then they repented of their repenting. They swooped down and destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. And for years now they have oppressed and threatened the Southern Kingdom of Judah

So nothing seemed more unlikely than the fall of Nineveh. It would be like someone going to Washington DC, the capital of the most powerful nation in the world and saying, “Your days are numbered ... your number is up. God is going to take you down.” People must have thought, “Not Nineveh. Look how powerful and impressive the city is.”

Perhaps you can understand what a burden this message would on the heart of the prophet Nahum. And in all of this we learn two very important things about God ... that He is good and that He is angry.

1. THE GOODNESS OF GOD (v.7)

Nahum 1:7 - The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,

People are good some of the time, but the Lord Almighty, is good all of the time. In spite of how we may feel when we face adversity, or our loved ones face adversity, God is good all the time.

When the Psalmist meditated on the Good Shepherd in Psalm 23 he concluded:

Psalm 23:6 - Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

So God is good and He is good because He is a “refuge in times of trouble.” The word “refuge” means a strong, fortified place. In ancient times when an enemy threatened them the people would look for a place to hide physically... a stronghold.

ILLUSTRATION – Last week in Boston Nan and I toured the JFK presidential library. We watched a video about the Cuban Missile Crisis. Some of you remember those days in 1962. I

was in elementary school. We had drills where we went out into the hallway, or sat under our desks. Those desks would be a “refuge” to us in the event of a catastrophe.

Psalm 34:8 - Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

Add to this the fact that God “cares for those who trust in him...” (Nahum 1:7). He shows grace to all people but especially to those who have put their trust in him. God knows our situation and He cares about us.

Nahum 1:7 - The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,

Have you reminded yourself today in your worship that that you are completely dependent on God? You don't breathe one breath and your heart won't beat one beat, apart from Him. When you woke up this morning did you thank Him that you awoke to live another day ... only because of Him? Have you meditated on just how needy you are and how faithful He is? A good thing to do on this Lord's Day is to spend some time this afternoon thinking about God's faithfulness and give Him thanks. Be reminded...

Nahum 1:7 - The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,

But there's another attribute of God revealed in our text ... not just the goodness of God but also...

2. THE WRATH OF GOD (v.8)

Nahum 1:8 - but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness.

God's goodness is directed at His people, but His wrath is directed at His enemies. Now we go back to vv.2-6 and we get a more complete picture of this quality of God.

Nahum 1:2 - The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies.

It says that the Lord is a “jealous” God.

ILLUSTRATION – I remember as a new Christian reading in places like this in my Bible that God was a jealous God. I struggled with that. The image that came to my mind was jealousy of a boyfriend when his girlfriend looked at another guy. We've all felt that emotion, and it's pretty ugly in us sometimes. How could God have those kinds of petty feelings?

But I've come to understand more about the jealousy of God. To be jealous is akin to being zealous. It means to feel deeply about something ... to be moved emotionally and motivated to action over the object of one's love. What does God love? Primarily He loves His own Name (His glory), and He loves His people. He is jealous of both of them.

He is jealous of His glory. Because He knows all things He knows that no false god deserves to be worshipped. He is jealous when the glory that rightfully and truthfully belongs to Him is given to another who is not worthy of it.

And because God loves all people, He is jealous that all people know that He alone is worthy of glory. God is right to jealously require our exclusive worship of Him; He is the only true God.

Nahum 1:2 says that God is not only a jealous God; He is an “avenging” God. This is revealed elsewhere in the OT.

Deuteronomy 32:35a - It is mine to avenge...

Deuteronomy 32:41b - I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me.

Now as we think about God’s vengeance remember that we’re not talking about retaliation. Retaliation is me getting even with you for something bad you did to me. This vengeance operates at a higher level of justice. Vengeance has to do with punishment for a violation. It’s not just getting even; it is getting justice.

Could we worship a just God who was not committed to rewarding good and punishing evil?

Nahum 1:2 - The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath.

God’s “wrath” is associated with His holiness. You would not want to worship a God who did not react negatively to evil. If we believe that God is holy and righteous, we cannot have a problem with His negative response to everything that is opposed to His holiness and righteousness. His goodness means that He will always do what is right. His holy wrath means He will always judge what is wrong.

Nahum 1:3a - The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.

He is also patient. He is not quick to anger. This is how God revealed Himself initially to Nineveh through the preaching of Jonah. Remember the message Jonah was given to preach was “Nineveh will be destroyed in 40 days.” Why 40 days? Because God was giving them time to repent. God is slow to anger.

But in spite of that God is “great in power.” The next few verses talk about how God controls the forces of nature to reveal His greatness and to fulfill His purposes in justice. Read vv.3b-5.

Nahum 1:3b - His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet.

Nahum 1:4 - He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade.

Nahum 1:5 - The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it.

Storms and seas and rivers and mountains all move at the command of God. Ultimately all people will tremble at how God marshals all of nature to fulfill His purposes.

Now v.6 begins with two rhetorical questions:

Nahum 1:6a - Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger?

Assyria has already tasted this. Nahum would have known of the events that are recorded in II Kings 18-19, events that happened about 50 years before he wrote this book. King Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah when Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom. Now the king of Assyria was a ruthless king named Sennacherib; he was coming up against Jerusalem. The Assyrians captured the surrounding towns and villages including a place called Lachish. From there Sennacherib sent a threatening message to Hezekiah.

Hezekiah encouraged the people to put their trust in the Lord. But the messenger continued to taunt God's people:

2 Kings 18:35 - Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"

Interesting! You hear the taunting questions asked by Sennacherib's messenger. Then you hear the questions asked by the Lord's messenger Nahum:

Nahum 1:6a - Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger?

ILLUSTRATION – Go with me to the British Museum in London. I can take you into an exhibit where hanging on the walls are carvings recovered by archaeologists in Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh ... carvings that boast of the brutal siege and ultimate capture of Lachish, the town from which Sennacherib sent his threatening message to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. The carvings depict the typical brutality of the Assyrians ... people impaled on spears, decapitated heads stacked in the shape of a pyramid. And nearby you can read the words of Sennacherib himself, inscribed on a clay column, on which Sennacherib boasts of what how he threatened Hezekiah, and had him surrounded "like a bird in a cage."

Interestingly, it's not the destruction of Jerusalem depicted on the carvings; it's Lachish. The only reason the destruction of Jerusalem was not depicted on the walls of a palace in Nineveh is because the people put their trust in the Lord.

In II Kings 19 we're told how Hezekiah took the threatening letter from Sennacherib and went into the temple and spread it out before the Lord and prayed...

2 Kings 19:16 - Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God.

And the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah to tell him that the Lord was going to save the city. And it goes on to say...

2 Kings 19:35-36 - That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacharib ... broke camp and withdrew..."

So there you have in one event, the goodness of the Lord revealed in the rescue of His people, and the wrath of the Lord revealed in the destruction of His enemies.

That was 50 years before. Now God has sent His messenger with a message for Nineveh and the Assyrians...

Nahum 1:8 - but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness.

Nahum is looking 50 years into the future. God is going to punish Nineveh. After 200 years of their evil and cruelty, he will make an end of them. The word "end" means "complete destruction."

Here's what happened: Nineveh had the Tigris River as a natural barrier on its eastern side. In 612 B.C. the Medes and Babylonians were planning an attack on Nineveh, but it was just too well-fortified. Historians tell us, however, that one day there came a great rain and the Tigris River overflowed its banks and cut a big hole in the walls of Nineveh that the invaders were able to enter and defeat the mighty city.

Nahum saw it 50 years before it happened...

Nahum 1:8 - but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh;

So complete was the overthrow that historians know that 300 years later when Alexander the Great passed through this region in his eastward conquests he marched right over the site of Nineveh and didn't even know that the capital of a world empire was buried beneath his feet. Imagine that! That's how decisively God can deal with a nation ... any nation, no matter how powerful and secure they think they are.

CONCLUSION

God is a God of goodness and He is a God of wrath. And we are reminded of this every time we look at a cross. We're approaching Easter and part of the message of Easter is the crucifixion of Christ. And what you see happening at the Cross of Christ is the intersection of God's goodness and God's wrath.

The vertical member of the cross reminds us of God's wrath against sin. And the horizontal member of the cross reminds us of God's goodness and His love for us. In the Cross of Christ those two realities meet. The only way that God's wrath against sin and His love for the sinner could be reconciled is for God to allow a sinless One, Jesus, take our place on the Cross. Then God's righteous requirement can be fulfilled through the death of Christ.

1 Peter 3:18 - For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,

So when we put our trust in Christ the righteousness of Christ is applied to us and we are saved and rescued. What a glorious, beautiful thing God did in the death of His Son.