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“A God of Condemnation or Compassion?”

Nahum 1:6-8

Where does your heart go when you are afraid?
There are many things to fear in our world.
There is economic disaster that can come with
the loss of a job, or the collapse of a business in-
dustry or nation.

There are natural disasters. Early this week, a
storm system spawned tornadoes and sparked
widespread flooding across the U.S. for four days.
At least 65 tornadoes hit the U.S., according to
rough estimates from the National Oceanic and At-
mospheric Administration.

At least 16 states were hit by the storm system in
some way, most in the South and the nation's mid-
section. In Arkansas, the deadliest tornado of the
past four days cut through some 80 miles of the
state. In all, 37 deaths in eight states have been
blamed on the storms.

Three members of a family known for its leader-
ship in the homeschool community died in a tornado
Sunday evening in Arkansas. The Tittle family of
Paron, Ark., runs a bookselling business called
ReformationKidz that's popular among home-
schoolers. Rob Tittle, 48, and two of his nine chil-
dren—Tori, 20, and Rebekah, 14—died in the
storm.

John Servati, was a junior at the University of Al-
abama and star of their swim team. He was also on
the Dean's List, was a U.S. Open qualifier who set
records in high school, and was involved in Big
Brothers and Big Sisters. John was a Christian, and
was described by everyone around him as an eve-
ryday hero.

John died on Monday after saving his girlfriend
during a Tornado. John held up a falling concrete
wall that was collapsing on him and his girlfriend so
she could escape. She was able to get away un-
harmed, the wall crushed him. John died a hero.

There are many things to fear in our world, and
many of them come from the evil in human hearts,
and human cultures: greed, deceit, sexual immorali-
ty and violence.

Most of you here live in relative safety, but many
people in the world today and through history have
had much to fear from such people and cultures.

If you look at the Bibles of most Christians in
America, those that show wear tend to show it
mostly in the New Testament, with some in the
Psalms, and Isaiah.

Many have the impression that the Old Testa-
ment picture of God is one of severity, judgment
and condemnation, while the New Testament God
is one of grace, mercy and compassion.

Which is it? Is God a God of condemnation or compassion? And is one of these to be preferred?

Most of you would opt for compassion, and as today is Compassion Sunday it's worth thinking upon.

As I was thinking about this in the past few days, I read two passages in my quiet time, my personal devotions, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament, that struck me as examples of places where both condemnation and compassion are seen together.

The first of them is the main passage I'd like to share with you: Nahum 1, esp. vv. 6-8.

Most of the prophets' messages are a mixture of condemnation and compassion, but Nahum contains mostly condemnation, but when you look closely, you see there is a compassionate side as well.

Verses 6-8 are a reminder that God is both righteous and merciful: (ESV) "Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him. The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness."

They tell us that 1. God is by no means indifferent to evil, 2. God is generous, protecting and loving to those who trust in Him, and 3. Those who trust in Christ look forward to deliverance rather than destruction.

1. God is by no means indifferent to evil.

The central truth expressed in Nahum's prophecy is that God is sovereign and is the moral judge, not only of His own people, but of the whole world.

Nahum's name means "comfort" or "compassion". The message given to him by God, is that Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, would be destroyed, and this brings comfort to God's people. The site lies across the Tigris river from the modern city of Mosul in Iraq (3rd largest).

The book was likely composed after c. 660 b.c. and before 630. Nahum's book is a sequel to, and a dramatic contrast with, the book of Jonah. Jonah's mission to Nineveh was probably sometime in the first half of the eighth century b.c., about 775. He was to warn that large city of God's impending judgment because of Nineveh's wickedness. To Jonah's dismay, the Ninevites heeded his message, repented, and were spared God's judgment.

This repentance, however, did not last beyond 745 b.c., when Tiglath-pileser III (745–728/727) made his people the leading military power in the Near East.

The vast Assyrian Empire was established by bloodshed and massacre, cruelty and torture, destruction, plundering, and exiling such as has seldom been seen in history.

It is not addressed to the Ninevites, but to the oppressed people of Israel and Judah, who for over a century had suffered the devastations of Assyria's armies, ending with the destruction of Samaria and captivity of its people in 722 BC.

The Assyrian Empire was known for its cruelty. According to F. W. Farrar, "Judged from the vaunting inscriptions of her kings, no power more useless, more savage, more terrible, ever cast its gigantic shadow on the page of history as it passed on the way to ruin. The kings of Assyria tormented the miserable world. They exult to record how 'space failed for corpses'; how unsparing a destroyer is their goddess Ishtar; how they flung away the bodies of soldiers like so much clay; how they made pyramids of human heads; how they burned cities; how they filled populous lands with death and devastation; how they reddened broad deserts with carnage of warriors; how they scattered whole countries with the corpses of their defenders as with chaff; how they impaled 'heaps of men' on stakes,

and strewed the mountains and choked rivers with dead bones; how they cut off the hands of kings and nailed them on the walls, and left their bodies to rot with bears and dogs on the entrance gates of cities; how they employed nations of captives in making brick in fetters; how they cut down warriors like weeds, or smote them like wild beasts in the forests, and covered pillars with the flayed skins of rival monarchs." (Farrar, *The Minor Prophets*, pp. 147,148).

Nineveh fell not because it was a large, wealthy, Gentile commercial city, but because it was a godless and idolatrous city, a city of violence, lust, and greed.

So v. 6: "Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him like fire."

In the face of such evil, it is good to know that God is by no means indifferent to evil.

"Wrath" is spoken of first in v. 2: Nahum 1:2 (NKJV) God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies".

In. v. 6, “Fire’ is a frequent image used in the OT to emphasize God’s fierce and all-consuming wrath (e.g., Gen. 19:24; Ps. 11:6; Amos 5:6).

Genesis 19:24 (NKJV) Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens.

Psalms 11:6 (NKJV) Upon the wicked He will rain coals; Fire and brimstone and a burning wind Shall be the portion of their cup.

Amos 5:6 (NKJV) Seek the LORD and live, Lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, And devour it, With no one to quench it.”

Broken “Rocks” represent the hardest objects in nature, but they are easily shattered by the Lord.
God is angry about evil, as He should be!

Lucille King tells this story: In our church’s vacation Bible school, one of the four-year-old boys rushed jubilantly to his father at the close of the evening’s activities and announced proudly that he had learned his Bible verse— Psalm 46:1 (NKJV) “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.”

“That’s great, Jacob! Say it for me,” replied his father, Harry.

Jacob beamed as he said, “God is our refuge and strength, and our President’s in trouble.”

Trans: It’s a funny story, but without a Savior, we’re ALL in trouble. God is by no means indifferent to evil, but ...

2. God is generous, protecting and loving to those who trust in Him: v. 7

“The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.”

What a contrast!

The Lord Delivers Those Who Take Refuge in Him.

A. In contrast to his anger, God is good to his people, blessing those who trust in him.

God's “goodness” is most often expressed in His generosity.

And He is patient: Nahum 1:3 (NKJV) “The LORD is slow to anger and great in power”.

B. God is also a protecting God. “A stronghold in the day of trouble”.

The Lord is the never-failing protector of his people. He will keep them safe and rescue them from human and spiritual enemies.

e.g., Psalm 27:1 (NKJV) A Psalm of David.
The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalm 37:39 (NKJV) But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble.

C. God “knows his people with love and affection, which results in his benevolent actions.

Compare the use of “know” in these 5 verses:

Amos 3:2 (NKJV) "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Psalm 1:6 (NKJV) For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Psalm 144:3 (NKJV) LORD, what is man, that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that You are mindful of him?

John 10:14 (NKJV) I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.

2 Timothy 2:19 (NKJV) Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Trans: So God is by no means indifferent to evil, but God is generous, protecting and loving to those who trust in Him. What this then means is that ...

3. Those who trust in Christ look forward to deliverance rather than destruction: v. 8

(ESV) “But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.” (not “darkness will pursue His enemies.”)

Nahum warns, “The Lord Destroys His Adversaries.” A striking contrast to v. 7.

The description in v. 8 of God dealing with his “enemies” echoes v. 2.

It is “Like an overflowing flood”, God’s judgment is overwhelming; Nineveh was to be destroyed by a flood. Nahum’s prediction reads like an eyewitness account of the city being attacked, overrun by the enemy, and plundered.

ESVSB: “The attacking army was a coalition made up of Medes and Babylonians, and possibly Scythians. Cyaxares (625–585 b.c.) was the leader of the Medes (who played the dominant role in the destruction of Nineveh), and Nabopolassar (626–605) led the Babylonians.”

“Now Nahum takes the reader into the city as it falls to the invaders.”

Nahum 2:6 (NKJV) The gates of the rivers are opened, And the palace is dissolved.

ESVSB – “The Khoser River flowed through Nineveh; north of the city were dams, most likely with gates to regulate the flow of this river. The besieging coalition could easily have closed the gates (cutting off this water supply), waited until a considerable quantity of water collected, and then opened the gates. The resulting mass of water crashing against and through Nineveh would have done much damage to portions of the city’s wall, system of gates, and internal structures, thus greatly aiding the besiegers. Another river that probably flowed through Nineveh was the Tebiltu, which could have been used by the coalition in the same manner. The destruction caused by the waters no doubt was a factor contributing to the short length of the siege—only three months. The palace melts away because of the floodwaters.”

Nahum 2:8 (NKJV) “Though Nineveh of old was like a pool of water, Now they flee away. "Halt! Halt!" they cry; But no one turns back.”

“Nahum places the reader in Nineveh as the city is being entered and overrun by the coalition forces.

The reader “sees” the fleeing inhabitants and “hears” some of the Assyrian commanders crying out, “Halt! Stand and fight,” but none turns back to do so. The Assyrians had terrified many, but now they themselves are filled with terror.”

So ch. 1:8, God “will pursue his enemies into darkness.” God’s judgment will culminate with removal from this life and everlasting condemnation.

But those who trust in Christ look forward to deliverance rather than destruction.

For those who might say, that doesn’t sound “Christian”, let me quote Jesus in the other passage I read that morning in my Quiet Time: Luke 17:26-27 (ESV) “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.”

If you saw the film, Noah, you saw that kind of destruction. What you did not see portrayed, is what Noah did when the ark came to rest: he offered sacrifices, pointing to the promised Messiah.

Nahum tells us that one day the power of hostile nations will be destroyed, and the people of God will live in peace, free from the danger of enemies of any kind.

So seeing that God is a God of both condemnation and compassion, how will you respond?

Nineveh was delivered when it repented, it fell when it thought it was strong.

Action: Take your heart to Jesus, the Savior, not trusting in your “goodness”, but confessing your desperate need to be delivered and transformed..

Trust solely in the Messiah who is Good, Protecting, and Loving.

Live every day in expectation of Christ’s coming again, as one delivered for eternity.