

Sinners in the Hands of a Good God | Nahum 1:1-8

The lecture says God is good and opposed to evil, and that he comes in judgment. The main point is to be comforted by God's goodness. The final point is cut off in the transcript.

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Automatic Shownotes

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Long Summary

Sinners in the Hands of a Good God | Nahum 1:1-8 YYYY-MM-DD• Erik Raymond• Nahum 1:1-8 Main Point: Be comforted by God's goodness. Outline: Character, coming, comfort. 1. God's character is good, holy, righteous, and jealous against evil (vv. 1-3a) - Nahum speaks concerning Nineveh, in the context of Assyria's oppression of Judah. - God's wrath is presented as his settled opposition to evil, not as a divided attribute separate from his goodness. - Because God is good, he does not remain indifferent to wickedness. 2. God's coming is powerful and uncompromising (vv. 3b-6) - The Lord is slow to anger and great in power. - The language of storm, earthquake, fire, and withering creation shows God's judgment coming with authority. - No one can stand before his indignation; his coming brings judgment on what opposes him. 3. God's comfort is refuge for his people and judgment for his enemies (vv. 7-8) - The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knows those who take refuge in him. - He will make a complete end of his adversaries and pursue them into darkness. - The sermon connects this to Christ, who bears sin, disarms evil powers, and gives refuge to sinners. - The call is to turn from sin and trust Christ, since there is no refuge from God, but there is refuge in God.

Brief Summary

Sinners in the Hands of a Good God | Nahum 1:1-8 YYYY-MM-DD• Erik Raymond• Nahum 1:1-8 Main Point: Be comforted by God's goodness. 1. God is good and opposed to evil. 2. God comes in judgment. 3. God is a r

Tags

Sinners, Good God, Nahum, judgment, goodness, evil, comforted, opposed, Main Point, scripture

Transcript

[0:31] I remember growing up, there was a kid in my neighborhood named Lenny. Lenny was a big kid.

Bully in the Shadows

[0:38] And I was not as big as Lenny. And Lenny liked to pick on me and other kids. And he got around. It seemed like he was everywhere that I was going. I remember him jumping out of seemingly nowhere with a stick to put in my spokes of my bike to cause it to stop and go over the handlebars. I remember him waiting for me. I got off the bus to pick on me, punching, throwing, knocking you into the bushes. I remember him holding me down and pulling my finger and saying, I'm going to pull it off. This is just torture, right? I'm saying this not for sympathy, but there's an illustration here. This Lenny was tough. And for me, in my context, there was no one to stand up. He was the biggest kid in the neighborhood. He was the baddest guy around. And there wasn't anybody who could stand up to this bully. We just had to run from him and to deal with it and be afraid that he might pop out of nowhere and just go off.

[1:51] This guy was a problem. And it's a story as old as Genesis 3. There's always oppression of helpless people in a sinful world, a post-Genesis 3 world. There's evil in the world. There are bullies. Whether we're talking about.

[2:13] Evil regimes of countries abusing and oppressing their citizens, or we're talking about abusive parents, abusive spouses, or we're talking about other bullies in other contexts. There's all kinds of ways, the schoolyard bullies all the way down to tyrants. It is a fact and a reality in this world that we live in.

Assyria's Rising Threat

[2:41] The passage that we find ourselves in right now, in Nahum chapter 1, is in the shadow of a bully. The bully is Assyria. The people who are being bullied, largely the whole world in that area, but primarily in the text is Judah, the southern kingdom. It's about 100 years, so call it 130 years, after Jonah. So Jonah, Nineveh, repents. Great things happen. There was a period, and then that subsided. During that time period, Nineveh, Assyria, gets stronger and stronger. And they get a new leader. They

begin attacking other countries. They go and they take the northern kingdom, Samaria Falls. They're invading and getting stronger and stronger, and they are getting to the place now with this context where they are breathing out threats against Judah. It looks like they're coming. They've already came after Judah once with Sennacherib, and God answered, and he beat back the bully.

[4:00] The question is, who's going to stand when Assyria is coming after Judah? Is it going to fall just like the northern kingdom? What's going to happen? Well, the natural answer would be Judah's king. He's going to do it. He's going to stand up, just like other kings. They're going to stand up and they're going to fight for the people. The problem is, the king of Judah is Manasseh. And Manasseh is not a spiritually godly man, nor is he a particularly good king.

[4:35] He's actually an idolater. His father, Hezekiah, had brought in all kinds of reform for Judah. And what happens? He undid it, largely making the country idolatrous, away from God. In the way that he dealt with foreign powers or bullies was that he gave them money to try to bribe them, to take care of them. Instead of appealing to God, he appealed to them that they might protect him. So when he looked at Assyria, those would be people that he would tend to fear and run from. So is it a question of who's going to defend or who's going to beat back the bully? It's not going to be Manasseh. It's not going to be anybody there. He's compromising. He's vacillating. He's weak. He's not going to do it. Who's going to stand up for Judah? Who is going to be able to defend these people, to preserve God's people and God's promises and God's purposes? Who's going to beat back the bully?

God Steps In

[5:42] This passage, we see that God steps in. And God demonstrates that he's the one who's going to stand in and defend his people against the bully. The title for the sermon is Sinners in the Hands of a Good God. My point that I want to persuade you of this morning from Nahum chapter 1, just the first eight verses, is to be comforted by God's goodness. Be comforted by God's goodness. We'll see this working through in three movements, his character in verses 1 through 3a, his coming in 3b through 6, and his comfort in verses 7, and 8, character coming in.

[6:30] And comfort.

God's Goodness and Wrath

[6:33] First, this character. This is in verses 1 through 3. We're introduced that the subject of this oracle or this declaration by God is concerning Nineveh. That's in verse 1. Nineveh, the ancient city. We talked about this at length the previous four weeks with Jonah. It's the capital city of Assyria, the strongest nation in the world at the time. And it's the vision of Nahum. Nahum is a prophet. And he's speaking primarily, as I said, to Judah, the southern kingdom. Northern kingdom, already toppled. People carried away. Samaria has been beaten. They're soon coming down to take Judah. That's the vision of what's happening. And this is where this comes in. And he gives this oracle. But as we start

to read this passage and think about it, I want you to think because he's introducing us to thinking about God. I want you to play a little word association with me. You can answer out loud if you want, but you don't have to. But just in your mind, perhaps, when I say hot, what's the opposite? Cold. When I say happy, what's the opposite? When I say wrath, what's the opposite? it?

[7:55] Love, mercy. See, this is what ends up happening. Oftentimes, when we think about God, we think about his love, and we say the opposite of God's love is his wrath. And I would submit to you that that's not a good way to look at God and his attributes. Here's why. The opposite of his love is actually not wrath. It would be indifference. If God loves his glory and loves his honor above all things, and he was to stop loving that, then he would be indifferent to that. It wouldn't be just judgment. It'd be indifference. And that presents a little bit of an interesting thing that what do we do with God's wrath? This passage talks about it. It's the subtitle in the ESV, God's Wrath Against Nineveh. We see it in verse 2. The Lord is a jealous and avenging God. He's avenging and wrathful. He takes vengeance on his adversaries. He keeps wrath for his enemies. How do we think about God's wrath?

[9:05] Well a lot of times when we think about god this is a little bit of a some mental heavy lifting to get started but i think there's a payoff, when we think about god we think about god kind of like a pizza if you will, maybe functionally we think like this you got pepperoni, you have sausage you have plain and you have his attributes kind of like that you have holiness on one side. You have love over here. You have justice, his righteousness, and you have these different attributes and they seem to work. And then you might even have a slice of wrath here and you're pitting them against each other as if God is divided up into different slices. He's loving, he's holy, he's righteous, he's wrathful, he's merciful. You have these different slices. If that's true, think about this. Does God ever change? No. He's never changed. He's always the same God. So who was he wrathful against in eternity?

[10:19] There was no people. There was no sin. There's nothing for God to be wrathful against. So who, to whom does he express wrath? No, he doesn't. Who exists? God exists. God alone exists in the beautiful trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And God is not expressing any wrath in eternity. Theologians speak of God's internal actings, and he's not acting in any wrath in eternity. The essential attributes of God are not wrath. God is a loving God. He's always loving. God is a holy God. He's always holy. God is also righteous. He always does what's right. He's also always.

[11:11] A God who I already mentioned is love. So he's always doing this. He's a good God. There's never a time when God is not loving or holy or righteous or good. He's always these things. If he was a wrathful God at his core, he would always be wrathful. He doesn't just have a wrathful day because God is not divided into parts. He's one God. He's never been wrathful in eternity. So what is his wrath? What is wrath? Wrath is God's settled opposition against all that opposes him.

[11:51] Bible scholars, theologians talk about this as anthropomorphic language. We talked about this as a fancy word. In other words, it's an accommodation of God to us in our finite understanding to know what God's like. So when we speak of God and his wrath, it's not his essential attribute as being a wrathful God. It's actually his goodness, his love, and his holiness interacting with that which is

opposing to him. God, in his goodness, when he encounters evil, he expresses his opposition to that, and that is what we would call his wrath. So yes, God does get angry at sin. He does demonstrate wrath and judgment against sin. But that's his goodness, his love, his holiness in motion.

[12:48] And God is not an eternally wrathful God. He's an eternally good and holy and loving God and righteous, who when he is opposed, it is his wrath that is expressed. Does that make sense? Why is this significant? Because the problem for Nineveh in this passage is primarily the goodness of God. Because God is good, he is not complacent to that which opposes him. Because God is good, he is not going to compromise his holiness. Because God is good, he is not going to be unrighteous. He is always loving, always holy, always righteous, and always good. And what we find in Nineveh, in Jonah, Nahum chapter 1, is a good God encountering evil. That's the comfort for the people, and that's the problem for Nineveh. Does that make sense? So when we think about God, we must not think of him as divided into these parts, but he's always holy. He's always good. He's always righteous. That's who he is. He always has been and he always will be.

[14:04] And when he finds opposition to his character, that's what looks like and is actually his wrath, his settled opposition. So this is what's going on in the passage. The goodness of God requires a response. In other words, Nineveh.

[14:25] Has been rebellious against people and have been wicked towards people, and it's just simmering up, and it's at the point now where God's anger and response to this is on display. It's kind of like if you—I was talking to Pastor Timothy about this this week, and he had this great illustration. He said, it's kind of like you're sitting there, and you turn a pot on your stove, and you want it to boil. You turn the heat up, and you're waiting for it to boil, and it seems like it takes forever for the pot to boil. It's just waiting for it to go. And then all of a sudden it's boiling and everything just boils up and it could go right over the pan, over the pot if you're not careful. And that's what it is. It's like we're looking at Assyria and it's this ongoing, wickedness and it's like God's anger and response to this because he's a good God is just beginning to boil. And finally, here in Nahum chapter 1, God's announcing it's overflowing. It's judgment time. And that's where we see that God is a jealous and avenging God. He is going to do what is right.

[15:35] He's going to be against and opposing his enemies. God is a patient God, but he's not a compromising God. He won't compromise his character. That would be to deny himself. So the biggest problem for Nineveh is God's goodness. This letter or this oracle is about Nineveh, but it's actually addressed to Judah. Judah is the recipient. It probably never made it to Nineveh.

[16:01] And the reason why it came to Judah is for comfort. That's what Nahum's name means, comfort, consolation. And so the consolation, the comfort is the goodness of God.

[16:14] And so too for us, we're to be comforted by God's goodness. Well, why? Well, because God's goodness, his character that doesn't change, as we see in verses 1 through 3, and then in verse 7, the Lord is good, actually goes into motion at his coming. This is in verses 3b through 6. This God who's

slow to anger, great in power, his way is in the whirlwind and the storm, it says. His clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry. He dries up all the rivers. Bashan, Kama, wither. The balloon of Lebanon withers. The mountains quake before him. The hills melt. The earth heaves before him. The world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can stand the heat or endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him. This is the description of God's coming in his judgment. And what we see here is he's unopposable. He's all-powerful. None can stand it.

The Coming Judge

[17:22] What's this image that he shows us with all of the natural description showing that God is sovereign over these things? He's the creator. And it's actually like a decreation picture that has ended up happening here. You have this whirlwind storm and dust and everything becoming dry and withering. It's decreation. It's a picture of judgment. This is God coming, and it's this vivid imagery. You actually have earth, wind, and fire. It's these elements being all marshaled together to show the greatness of God. You see whirlwind and storm and cloud and dust and feed rebuking of the sea. Mountains quaking and towns withering. Earth heaving. Everything's shaking. There's fire. There's rocks. You get the idea, right? This is sensory overload. What's happening? The Creator is coming. And he's coming in judgment against that which opposes him. The good God is coming. These vivid descriptions are displaying his power. He's using all creation as a theater to display his power. That's what he's doing. He's showing that he's going to come and he's going to bring judgment.

[18:41] Reminds me of that movie, The Avengers. There's a scene where some of you, I'm sure, are familiar with this, where Loki, who thinks of himself as God, is being confronted by Thor, the actual God in the story of thunder. And then the sky starts to darken. The lightning begins to crack. And Thor warns him that something powerful is coming. And someone asked Loki, he says, you scared of a little lightning? And Loki responds, I'm not overly fond of what follows. That's the reality. In the moment, he realizes it's not the lightning itself. It's the problem. It's what the lightning means. It's that someone more powerful is coming behind the lightning. That's the trouble. And that's what's happening in Nahum chapter one. with this overwhelming description of whirlwind and storm and clouds and mountains quaking and earth heaving. It's not so much the physical phenomenological realities that are on display.

[19:50] It's the God who comes behind them. And he's not okay with Nineveh. He's not okay with them. So the key question With this God Who is like this Who is uncompromising in his goodness And who will by no means clear the guilty This God is coming Who can stand Who can endure Who can endure.

[20:16] If God is like this, and his coming is like this, who can stand?

Refuge in Trouble

[20:23] Well, that moves us to the third movement, his comfort. This is in verses 7 and 8. In this passage, we see who he is. And this is to be the comfort for the people who are reading it. And what we see is that he cares, and he's powerful. Look at verse 7. 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 complete end of the adversaries and will pursue them, his enemies, into darkness. This is who he is. He's good.

[21:02] And this is what he'll do. He's all-powerful. This is to be the comfort. The comfort is who God is and what he's going to do. For a people that are living in the shadow of the bully, Assyria is breathing out threats. They're taking up ground. They're intimidating everybody. They are the bully. What's the comfort? It's who God is and what he's going to do. He's a stronghold in the day of trouble. That's the place you go to be protected and rescued. That's who God is. He's a stronghold in the day of trouble. Those who take refuge in him, he knows those who take refuge in him. He cares about them. It's like he's a bodyguard. He's the secret service. He's the protector. He's the one who's going to keep him safe. It's God. They're in the day of trouble, but God will take care of them.

[22:00] Not only that, he says what he's going to do to the enemy. Verse 8, with an overwhelming flood or an overflowing flood, he'll make a complete end of the enemy. He's going to end them. He's going to end Assyria. He's going to end the city of Nineveh and all of their violence and all of their destruction. He's going to end it. He's going to make a complete end of the adversary and pursue them into darkness. He's going to, literally, he's the picture of chasing them down. The bully is going to be in bondage. The vulnerable are going to be protected. This is what God does. And don't miss the fact it says in verse 8, with an overflowing flood, he's going to make an end to his adversaries. Why is that significant? Well, Nahum's writing at about 650 to 630 B.C.

[22:52] Nineveh gets destroyed in 612 B.C. And how does it go down? This is really interesting. You know, this was actually a point of contention for people that believed that the Bible was actually all wrong. And that some of the history of the Bible was out of whack because they could never find a city called Nineveh. Historically, it wasn't anywhere. It's in the Bible, but where is it? Until some archaeologists in the 19th century discovered this place that had been buried down so far that it was actually devoid of sight. They hadn't discovered it because it had been destroyed by a flood and beaten down so much. So when God says later in the book of Nahum that he's going to wipe it from their memories, he literally did it. And when he says he's going to destroy it with an overwhelming flood. He actually did it. So when God says that he's going to step in and fight the bully, he's going to end them, chase them down, flood them, and wipe them off the map. He did it.

[24:01] This is who God is. This is the God of the Bible. And his comfort is that he is good. That's the comfort to those who take refuge in him. But the fact that he's good is also a discomfort for those who oppose him. You could say it like this. There's no refuge from this good God, but there's refuge in the good God. You see? You can't run from him, but you can run to him. So run to him in faith and trust him.

Christ Beats the Bully

[24:41] So who are your bullies? Who are the enemies? I realize that opening with an illustration like a guy in my neighborhood named Lenny, that kind of might actually make it feel like this is Lenny, and then you've got the king of Assyria. Come on. Like, this is great disparity. And in between all of that, there's things like the Nazis and horrible leaders and wicked things, and then things that have probably happened to you in this room that are far more significant than, the elementary school boy being bullied by some kid in his neighborhood. Horrible things, I'm sure. But I say it to bring it in from the small thing to the great thing, that the reality is that all of us know what it's like to have the bully come after us.

[25:39] And many times the bully never gets the judgment. There are actual people who have done or are doing evil to people like us and people in this world. And we trace up the source of that evil. It always goes up to the unholy triad of evil. Sin, Satan, and death. He references in this passage that same passage that Jonah referenced about God being jealous and vengeful and, slow to anger and great in power no means clear the guilty this God is going to make things right, who's the biggest bully we face what's the biggest problem we face, the biggest issue that we face is sin, Satan, and death. There's no greater problem than the presence of sin, the power and reality of death, and the power and reality of death.

[26:44] In the presence and reality of Satan. So who can stand in and beat back Satan? Who can stand in and pay for our sin? Who can stand in and go against that great undefeated enemy of death and win? See, that's the bully. That's what's coming after us. Ultimately, the biggest issue we face. It's sin, Satan, and death. Who can beat down the bully? Colossians chapter 2, verses 11 through 14 tell us that Jesus Christ on the cross disarms the rulers and authority. That's Satan. That he paid for our sin, having it nailed to the cross.

[27:35] Of sin is removed, and that through his death, we can actually live. And in that reality of Christ's death for us, we're reminded that there are no limits to human evil. Sin is costly and pervasive. There are limits to human justice. A lot of people seem to get away with doing bad things. But there is no limit to divine justice. There is a day of reckoning. And there is no limit to divine goodness. He is and always will be good. The cross is the declaration, brothers and sisters, that every wrong you've ever committed has actually been made right. It's been squared. The circle has been squared. He paid for your sin. God doesn't compromise. He paid for it.

[28:40] The cross is also the declaration that for all those who resist Christ and run from him and will not turn from their sin, that hell awaits because God doesn't compromise. That's why hell lasts forever. Because a good God requires a punishment to commensurate with the sin. So either sins are paid for and absolved and dealt with and finally atoned for on the cross, while they're paid for in eternity. The God who is good requires it to be satisfied. So I just asked you this morning, are you trusting in Christ, the good God who forgives sins by giving his own son for you? Or are you standing ready to face him after you die, to deal with face with judgment. Turn from Christ, turn from sin, and turn to Christ even

now. He's worthy, and he'll have you. There's no refuge from him, because there's no limits to divine justice, but there is refuge in him, because he's a good God, and he'll forgive you.

[29:56] And for all of us, we should remember the words of that great hymn. On the Mount of Crucifixion, fountains opened deep and wide. Through the floodgates of God's mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide. Grace and love like mighty rivers poured incessant from above. Heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love. Peace, justice, and love. The only way that you can have a passage like Exodus 34, where you have a God who does not bend his righteousness and a God who extends mercy is through Jesus Christ. There's the comfort. The comfort in a God who's good, who will punish sin and will make things right in the end and will pardon sinners like us. This is good. So when you have things that happen to you, whether it's personal life or you encounter things in the news or think about tragic things in the world, and you say, this is horrible, you can say, I know that God's going to make it right in the end. He showed this with the cross. And when you find yourself sinning and falling short of God's standard, you could say, I know that this is the type of thing that Christ paid for on the cross, and I am so thankful for his mercy.

[31:24] This is what he's done. He's so good. Rest in him. Be comforted by God's goodness. Let's pray. Our Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for even for a passage which is heavy. But underneath the heaviness, there is a great sweetness and tenderness of your love for your people. You intend your people as the original readers and even us to be comforted by your goodness. Pray that you would help us to see that. Even today as we prepare to come to the Lord's Supper We pray We rest in you A God who does not change And is always good We pray in Jesus' name Amen.