



Pulpit Ministry Mount Merrion Free Presbyterian Church. Lord's Day pm 30th Nov 2008

Scripture Reading Nahum Ch1

Series 'The Voice of the Minor

Prophets.'

This section of the Old Testament Canon to which we turn is sadly neglected by the Lord's people. The unfamiliarity of such books as Nahum, may in no small part be due to the terminology placed upon them by the Church; they are referred to as being the '*Minor Prophets*.' Before I am charged with inconsistency, the title of this series, is intended to draw attention to the widely accepted title of this section of God's word. In no way should these prophetic books be thought to contain an inferior message to the other '*major*' prophetic books such as Jeremiah or Isaiah. Any potential, mental distinction should either be avoided or if already accepted, disposed of immediately. The message that these men brought to the stage of world history, played a vital role in the overall revelation of God to this world. We believe that contained in the whole word of God, is what God intended for our learning, we cannot do without any part of it. If you look at Ch1v1, the chapter begins with the title of the book, showing the subject that is to be dealt with, "*The book of the vision.*" The word '*vision*' could be understood as meaning '*revelation*' or '*communication*.' The book of Nahum is a Book of revelation. There is a paradox [seeming contradiction] that arises in v1, the Prophet's name means '*consolation*' or '*comforter*' yet as we read his prophecy, we discover that his message was one of destruction and wrath, for those who set themselves against God. He prophesied that God would destroy Assyria and the city of Nineveh [Ch3:7]. His message would have brought comfort to the Lord's people, the knowledge that such powerful foes would be overcome. However, the prophet does not rejoice in the news, it is not for him to alter the message, yet it lies heavy on his heart [v1], "*The burden of Nineveh.*" He carries this burdensome prophecy to Nineveh [100yrs after Jonah].

However, before he delivers his message to the city of Nineveh, Nahum delivers his revelation [vision]. We discover this vision to be a revelation of the character and attributes of God, through a series of statements. The purpose of these statements is intended to warn those who are under the impending wrath of God! What a revelation it is!

1) A Revelation of God's Honour. "*God is Jealous.*" [v2].

The word '*jealous*' [adjectival use], '*or*' '*jealously*' [adverbial form] may readily conjure up in our mind, that which is a negative emotion, whereby someone is jealous of another's popularity or possessions. However, it should never be thought that should an unholy emotion is to be found in God. [John Piper], "*God is not jealous like an insecure employer who fears that his employees might get lured away by a better salary elsewhere. God's jealousy is not the reflex of weakness or fear.*" When the scriptures speak of God being '*jealous*' it is in a right and holy sense. The word jealous implies that God treasures his person, He is infinitely jealous of that which is His, namely his own glory and honour. Yet, such is the jealousy of God, He displays a holy hatred against all who would seek to rob him of his glory and all that which is against his honour. What is against him? Sin! Moses declares that the name of the Lord is '*Jealous*', Exodus 34:14 "*For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*" Ex Ch20:5, Men are instructed to avoid idolatry, for no other reason than that it robs God of something that is his, "*I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.*" This the prophet Nahum wants the people to see, that such is the insult upon God's Honour that it will surely bring down the judgement of God. Sinners continually provoke God by their sin, their idolatry. pg477

2) A Revelation of God's Patience. "*The Lord is Slow to anger.*" [v3].

Many people conclude that there cannot be a God, because if there were, '*why does he tolerate all the evil in the world?*' they then set themselves to do more evil!

Ecc Ch8:11 "*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*" Never view the patience of God as a reason for you to continue in an impenitent state. That is the way that men think, they pass their life upon this earth, year after year, securing to themselves a false confidence that all is well, that if God was going to show any disapproval with their lifestyle he would have done so by now! What flawed reasoning! Scripture warns men not to abuse the patience of God, but to understand all things are open before his eye, every open sin, every concealed sin, he knows it and has kept a record of it! Turn to Jonah Ch1:2, their sin came up before the Lord, punishment was threatened, they repented at that time, the threat was not executed, but it seems now years later, the citizens of Nineveh are wondering was the threat real in the first place? It never took place as Jonah said!

Have you ever wondered why men have become so bold in their ventures in sin? Ultimately it is because there is no fear of God in their hearts; but Paul says '*before their eyes*', they see others supposedly getting '*off the hook*', then they become bold in their sin! [*When a government downgrades sin and removes the deterrent, men will hasten on in sin. The UK government has lost control of society by legislating away laws governing sin, you cannot remedy sin by any other means, e.g social improvement schemes, knife amnesties etc*].

Turn to Rom Ch2:4-5. The Context in which Paul is speaking is that of men being so foolish so as to imagine, that they can get away with their sin. They imagine that with the passing of time and no immediate sign of any judgement upon their lifestyle, they will escape the judgement of God, "*Thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?*" Such reasoning is that of a madman! Paul's condemnation of such pseudo logic is seen in v4-6, "*Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Who will render to every man according to his deeds.*"

"Patience sets many a sinner on running into the arms of mercy."

...Stephen Charnock...

If there is one attribute that blows the mind of the Christian, it is the longsuffering of God. I can get my head somewhat around the doctrine of election and predestination, I can see something of the majesty of the doctrine of adoption, I can bask in the joyous rays of a knowledge of union to Christ, but to try and understand why God puts up with sin, goes far beyond the capacity of the most theologically, academically trained mind to grasp! That God restrains his holy character in the face of such vileness. The testimony of scripture is that God is quick to build up, yet slow to pull down [*six days to create the universe, yet took seven days to destroy one city, Jericho; an instant of time to create man, the pinnacle of his creation, yet he suffered 120yrs before destroying man, allowing sin to reach unimaginable proportions on the earth*]. God showed mercy with Nineveh, the Jewish historian Josephus reckons it was one hundred and fifteen years after this prophecy that Nineveh was destroyed. Bishop Usher dates it as 626 B.C. God is Patient!!

3) A Revelation of God's Mercy.

The only way that the apostle Paul can explain the longsuffering of God in Rom Ch2:4-5, is in terms of His goodness and mercy! Indeed by His patience toward man, he only ever intends mercy. We see the antithesis of this before the creation of man. When Satan and a third part of the angels fell, God showed no patience and he showed no mercy. He sent them immediately to hell! Towards Satan there was no proposal of mercy made, no space for repentance given and there never will be any patience shown! We often use the phrase of men, '*wouldn't give him space.*' etc. But when man fell, God showed mercy and he displayed patience! Instead of sending the world headlong into the fires of hell, he gives men space to repent. That is how Paul wants men to interpret the patience of God, that they seeing that God has not as yet brought them into condemnation for their sins, they might repent from their ways and throw themselves on the mercy of God. Stephen Charnock said, "*Patience sets many a sinner on running into the arms of mercy.*" The man who does not read the patience of God that way, but instead chooses to believe that he will escape the judgement of God, will find himself most sadly mistaken. The Lord will come looking for you in a day and an hour in which you are least expecting it.

4) A Revelation of God's Power. "*And great in power.*" [v3].

Nahum also sets about describing God's power, he describes the Lord as being '*great in power.*' This thought is developed by the prophet in vv.3-5, "*The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry...the mountains quake at him, and the hills melt...*" Where does this view of God lead us? Such a view of God should lead us to the same place where it led Nahum, to conclude, who then can resist such a power! The conclusion of Nahum's revelation is in v6, "*Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?*"

Men who have abused the patience of God and have discovered him to be '*slow to anger*' will discover Him to be swift in the execution of his wrath! He will come as a man of war upon his warhorse, his face set against his enemies. Who can stand before His indignation? A God such as this! There is only one God, he will destroy all other idols and those who follow after them!

5) A Revelation of God's Goodness. [v7].

God's goodness is seen in that he forewarns men of their impending doom, of coming judgement, even though he is not obliged to do so! God is under no obligation to man to warn man! Yet God does, of his own sovereign will!

a) Gracious Warnings.

Charnock said of God that ¹"*He speaks before he strikes, and speaks that he may not strike. Wrath is published before it is executed.*" For one hundred and twenty years God allowed sin to multiply upon the face of this earth to an unimaginable level that this world has never seen the like of since, but one day will; yet God warned men of the coming flood of judgement. Did men pay heed? Matthew in his gospel informs us that, "*in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark.*" [Matt Ch24:38]. No man can judge God and say that he was not warned, he only inflicts that which he has forewarned them of. How gracious is our God, that though even he be not the Father of the ungodly, in judgement he displays His grace [The earthly Father forewarns the rebellious Child; the law of the state forewarns the citizens of that kingdom].

b) Frequent Warnings.

Many warnings have been given. In the Old Testament God sent his prophets with the message "*Thus saith the Lord.*" Job 33:14 "*For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not.*" He sends one message, and he sends another message in order to a man's attention. Today he still sends his messengers proclaiming the day of His wrath, sinner heed the warning voice, for God will not always continue to speak!

There are some of you who have abused God's patience and cast your own interpretation upon his slowness to anger. The '*presupposed*' silence of heaven, as you see it, has assured you that everything is fine, while it is not! Instead of growing bolder in sin, you need to face up to sin!

In conclusion, I want you to see, that man only has an existence on this earth, because of God's patience and mercy. He is not here to live out a mere existence. Time has been given to him to seek mercy and he must do that, if not he must and will perish! How are you spending the time that God has graciously given you? Are you wasting it in some worthless pursuit, not having repented of your sin? Or has the goodness of God led you to repentance, whereby now you are living to the glory of God? For many of your companions, friends and people known to you, they do not have the time that you presently have, they have been haled down to an eternal prison, with no further '*space to repent.*' It was Charnock who impressed upon men to consider that God who would not wait upon the fallen angels one moment, in order that they would repent, gives to men millions of moments to turn to him for mercy [there is over 525,000 minutes in one year; 20yrs = approx 10,500,000]. The Rich man in hell, would have given all his riches, but for a fraction of one of those moments! Oh that the goodness of God would lead you to repentance!

¹ Charnock Stephen; *The Attributes of God* [Baker Books]; pp.488