

On the Gospel Ministry, pt. 1

‘Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news’

- *Nah.* 1:15

One of the greatest challenges you and I face is to look to God. Whether in the depths of discouragement, or even in the heights of joy, we are to look to God for both our help in time of need as well as with our thanks for joys received. It would all seem rather simple and straightforward. But on account of our own weakness, and sin either *within* us or *against* us (usually both), as well as temptations *before* us, we have need to look to God.

So it is that we note the word that begins v. 15: ‘Behold!’ The force of the Hebrew word would be more realistic to us today if it was said, ‘Look at that!’ ‘Check that out!’ ‘Would you look at this!’ The word is about something surprising, something wonderful, something heart-stirring. It’s the first of 4 times that Nahum will use the word to signal a different nuance or emphasis in what he is saying (cf. 1:15; 2:13; 3:5, 13). (And we might expect this since his book is, as we learned at v. 1, a ‘vision’ given by God.)

But whenever we say to someone, ‘Would you look at that!’, what are we doing but calling attention from one object to another; from one scene of life to another? And Nahum is doing just this. Having focused our attention on the very weighty and solemn attributes of God’s justice against wicked Nineveh, and at the same time His reminding Judah that He has used the Assyrians to afflict even them for their unfaithfulness (1:12), we see that it was so that there might be a true return to, and better sight of that which God has for His people: *the grace of the gospel*.

‘Would you look at this’

Perhaps you've wondered why we've focused as we have on the attributes of God's justice and vengeance. Because they are *Nahum's* focus. The first words off his pen are that his message is a 'burden'. After the first 6 verses describing God's terror, he assures that He also is good to those who trust Him (v. 7). But then he's right back at His vengeance at v. 8 to complete even *this* thought.

The once-trust, but then apostasy of Nineveh warrants all this. That Judah, too, has veered and is at this point in history careening toward a like apostasy themselves (which they will have in some 50 years), warrants their examining themselves by these very things. For this reason God afflicted them by the Assyrians. And so Nahum speaks in the same vein as our Lord who, disciples both true and false, *first warned and then comforted* His disciples (as we saw last week).

Nahum's emphasis has every relevance for Nineveh (and the wicked) judged for their wickedness, Judah (and the righteous) chastened for their unfaithfulness, and all the righteous (as Judah) rescued from the cruel oppression of sin.

And these things have every relevance for you and me to see that we have need to look *at* as well as *to* God. And when we do, through a serious reckoning with this history and these themes - of which we may prefer not to hear as Nahum has emphasized them - we come truly to look at God *and 'Behold on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news.'*

As God's law and justice drives us to the gospel; so let the gospel be taken up from these things.

Thus we come to v. 15. It concerns the gospel ministry. From an OT book such as this, how do we know that? This phrase about 'good news' is what the English equivalent we use today ('gospel') means. So there is this simple level of vocabulary. But whatever the language in which you come at it - Hebrew, Greek, or Old English - the idea is of a herald sprinting over the terrain from places remote bringing important

and solemn news (cf. *Job* 1:14-19). The modernized version is, ‘We interrupt this program to bring you the latest breaking news...’ *The gospel ministry is about interruptive and breaking news.*

But more, v. 15 is about the gospel ministry because of the way it is used elsewhere. The prophet Isaiah, who was the prophet previous to Nahum, used this very statement. It is slightly different; but in essence it is the same. ‘How lovely on the mountains,’ he says, ‘are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation.’ (*Isa.* 52:7). But what is significant about this is that the apostle Paul applied Isaiah’s words - again, clearly echoed here in Nahum - in his letter to the Romans as he taught them *the gospel* (per *Rom.* 1:15). At chapter 10, he is concerned for his fellow Jews who did not believe in their promised Messiah. Instead, they sought their own righteousness through the Law. Paul longs for them to call on the Lord. But he notes that calling comes through believing, and believing through hearing, and hearing through a preacher, and a preacher from those who send him (vv. 14-15). It is at that point - at the sending of a preacher - that Paul quotes Isaiah’s phrase echoed by Nahum.

So Paul would have us read Nahum - like Isaiah - as speaking of the gospel ministry - yes, even the NT gospel ministry.

Today we do so as a 1st part in a series, this time focusing the *messenger*. ‘Behold on the mountains the feet of him *who brings good news.*’

Nahum has had us consider God (vv. 2-8), and then Nineveh (vv. 9-12) and Sennecharib (v. 11), and then Judah (v. 12), and then Assyria (vv. 13-14). But now the lens of this dramatic feature presentation has come to focus on one who only has been behind the scenes, almost shrouded in mystery and veiled by shadows. But now he comes into public view. He is running. He is coming. He is preaching. Who is he?

It is a *human* person (with feet). It is a *single* human person. It is a single *male* human person. It is a single male human person who comes down to the people *from a higher place*. It is a single male human person who comes down from a higher place *with the good news* of God breaking the oppression and bondage of sin and the wicked.

Do you know who it is? It is:

I. CHRIST THE MESSENGER OF THE GOSPEL

There is no need to defend such an interpretation of v. 15 against a charge of unbridled allegory. We truly acknowledge that Nahum is using a somewhat common image of the runner bringing news. But we believe that there is more to the picture than a mere anonymous person bearing the gospel. One is not trying to squeeze Christ into a somewhat obscure prophet's message where He really isn't. No! We should be embarrassed that we are not quick to find Christ even here. For the entire OT has been telling us to look for Him, to 'behold on the mountains the feet of Him who brings good news', to await the promised Seed of the woman, to be ready to hear the words of the one like unto the prophet Moses, to await the coming Son of David.

If you have ears to hear it, Jesus of Nazareth *is* the one of whom Nahum spoke. He is 'the Messenger of the covenant' as the prophet Malachi tells us, whom we are not only to 'Behold!', but also in whom to 'delight' (*Mal.* 3:1-2).

But even with this, if we keep reading our Bibles, we come into the NT and find significant features of Christ that, like several stringed instruments, play in concert with each other. And as they do, they support the notion that Christ is this messenger of the gospel of whom Nahum spoke.

There is with Jesus Christ the contrast between two significant eras. 'The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached' (*Luke* 16:16). The Law and the Prophets are one era. Christ and the gospel - their fulfillment - is the last. One condemns, the other brings salvation. The one is

about a righteousness we cannot achieve by ourselves, the other about a righteousness now achieved by Christ.

There is with Jesus Christ's own words, the fulfillment in Him of what Nahum would have us look for. 'Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.' (Mark 1:14-15). With Christ, in a way *not* with John, there is the gospel.

Further, there is with Jesus, and His interactions and miracles among the multitudes, the gospel of the kingdom. 'He went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom *and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.*' (Matt. 4:23). It is this that sets the context for the 'Sermon' on the mount (5-7), where Jesus constantly is teaching the nature and dynamic of that kingdom's news.

So we should see that Nahum speaks of *Christ* as *the* Messenger of the gospel.

You ask yourself, then, 'Have I ever beheld the feet of this One who brings good news?' Have I beheld the feet of this One, and seen that I am unworthy to unloose even the sandal beneath them? Have I beheld the feet of this One, and seen that they remain unwashed by me, though He would take the towel to wash mine? Have I beheld the feet of this One, who endured spikes to be hammered into them for the salvation of sinners such as myself? Have I beheld the feet of this One such that I empty my expensive perfume on them and wash them with my penitent tears? Have I beheld the feet of this One, who will one day make all His enemies to be a footstool for them? Have I beheld the feet of this One, who raised up to the heavenly mountain of Zion, runs to me swiftly in the gospel preaching? Have I beheld this One whom my eyes have not seen, but whom I yet love with the eyes of faith?

'I will lift up my eyes to the mountains. From where will come my help? My help comes from the Lord' (Psa. 121:1) as He runs to me with good news. 'Behold he comes!' Am I glad to see Him? Do I fix my eyes on Him? Do my eyes follow Him as He descends to speak? Am I glad to meet Him?

There is often very little to boast about with respect to our own feet. Would we speak freely of their little hairs? Their somewhat crooked toes? Their unique aroma, and ability to hold the material bits of our socks?

But with Christ we say: 'Behold on the mountains the feet of Him *who brings good news.*'

So, Nahum spoke of Christ as *the* bringer of good news. But in no way does that eliminate:

II. CHRIST'S MESSENGERS OF THE GOSPEL.

In fact, it leads *to* them and *confirms* them. (We acknowledge that Christ is the preeminent Messenger of the gospel. But we are foolish to not recognize the common thrust of the metaphor Nahum used. He speaks of the common town herald who brought an announcement to the people. So while there is *Christ* here, there are also His messengers: preachers He has called in every generation.)

And the Scripture gives us sound teaching in how we ought to think about, and what we ought to expect from, a biblical gospel ministry in terms of its messengers. (We give a broad, but only concise, overview.)

1) *First*, as a general point, all true gospel messengers are sent in Christ's commission. We see this with the apostles; Christ called them to Himself, and trained them. And then after His ascension, He sent them to preach and establish the churches. They didn't volunteer for the ministry. Nor did they send themselves.

We see from the apostles that the gospel ministry is a ministry *sent* in Christ's commission. Three NT expressions help us see this:

Cf. 'send', per *Matt.* 10:16; *John* 20:21; ***Rom.* 10:14**, where Paul references Nahum/Isaiah and supports a 'sent' (and not 'self-going' or 'signed-up') ministry of preachers

Cf. 'go' per *John* 15:16; *Matt.* 28:19-20; *Acts* 28:26

Cf. 'ambassadors for Christ' at *2 Cor.* 5:18-20; *Eph.* 6:20... 'ambassadors' being those sent by a superior officer to speak only *His* Word with *His* authority and for *His* reception among the hearers. Preachers represent Christ Himself.

But it goes further than merely the apostles. They, too, ordained men for the ministry by the laying on of hands to be an established practice for after they were gone. Thus we read of second-generation pastors such as Titus and Timothy being placed into the gospel ministry. Thus we read of Paul instructing *them* about what men *they* are to find are suitable, and how to place such men into the gospel ministry publicly and accountably.

So the gospel ministry is a ministry *sent* by Christ Himself. Therefore be warned of men whom the Lord has not sent. Be warned of men who have started up their own 'ministry' apart from the ministry outlined in Scripture, and without any validation and confirmation by a sending church leadership. What God said through Jeremiah of the false prophets here applies to many a self-made minister today: 'I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied.' (*Jer.* 23:21, 32)

2) And *then further*, as more particular points, all gospel messengers are appointed by Christ in the Church with His authority and for His purpose.

He has them continue in what He began. Like Luke's approach to writing the Gospel and Acts, they will go back to the source (*Luke* 1:1ff with *Acts* 1:1). They will 'behold Him', and not carve out a new path. They do not innovate, or alter the message to suit peoples' carnal fancies. But they resonate and advance and enlarge what has been spoken by the Lord to His apostles and in their writings.

He sends them with His Word. Let them preach it accurately! Let it not be another gospel! (*Gal. 1:6-9*) Let it be rightly apportioned! (*2 Tim. 2:15-16*) Let them preach it exclusively, determining to know nothing among them but ‘Christ crucified!’ (*1 Cor. 2:2*; cf. *Rev. 22:18-19*) Let them preach it always, not giving in to pressures for ear tickling, tale-telling, and mind massaging! (*2 Tim. 4:1ff.*)

Why all this? Because gospel messengers are sent *by* Christ and *for* Christ. Thus He provides them with His Spirit. And they walk and preach by Him (*Luke 24:48-49*; *John 20:21-23*; *15:26-27*).

Therefore, by way of final impressions of these truths:

Since Christ is the *origin* of all gospel messengers that come in His name, then He is the *objective* of the gospel ministry. Since gospel preachers are sent *by* Christ and *for* Christ, then He is not only the *origin* of the gospel message, but He is its *objective*.

‘That *Christ* might be all and in all!’ ‘That His name would be the only Name!’

So it is that Moses spoke of the Prophet to come (*Acts 3:20-22*; *Deut. 18:18-19*); and David of the risen Savior (*Acts 2:31*; *Psa. 16*); and Isaiah, of the King whom he ‘saw’ - whom he, too, ‘beheld’ - in His glory (*John 12:41*; *Isa. 6*); and John, who gave His ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ (*John 1:34, 36-37*).

Christ is the objective of the gospel. Is He *your* objective in hearing it? In laying it up in your hearts? In practicing it in your lives? In teaching it to your children? In announcing and sharing it with your friends and neighbors?

We do well to remember Paul’s earnest accent of *Christ* as the objective of the gospel:

‘We preach Christ crucified.’ - *1 Cor. 1:23*

‘I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.’

- *1 Cor. 2:2*

‘I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ² By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ³ For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴ And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures’ - *1 Cor.* 15:1-4

‘the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us’ - *2 Cor.* 1:19

‘We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.’ - *2 Cor.* 4:5

And that is what we see at *Rom.* 10:1-13 - Christ and His salvation is the substance of the message. The word is not far from us - up in heaven that someone would need to bring it down, or deep in the earth that we would need to bring it up - no, *Christ Himself has brought* the word very close to us in His incarnation, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. *You and I have no excuses to make; we have a Savior to take!* ‘Behold, on the mountains, the feet of *Him who brings good news!*’¹

As we began, so we end. Our greatest challenge, and our abiding need, is to look to God; that whatever the sin, whatever the weakness, whatever the misery, whatever the need, we would see Christ alone. God has sent Him that we might see Him. ‘Behold Him!’ He runs to you! He speaks to you! Here He is again, today, coming down the mountain! And He comes for you. Will you go to Him?

‘Behold, on the mountains, the feet of Him who brings good news!’

¹ Further implications are: 1) Let the people receive their gospel messenger as one sent from Christ for their good. - ‘Behold, on the mountains the feet of him [sent] to bring good news!’ 2) Every gospel messenger, then, should be marked with Christlikeness in everything.