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Nahum / Nahum 3

Series Number: 3

Readings:

- Nahum 3

- Heb 11:39-12:2,28-39

- 1 Peter 1:3-9

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®

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Introduction

Introduction Proper

In Hong Kong, China, they have a 9-9-6 culture. That's where you work from 9am to 9pm, 6 days a week. People work their butts off to try to make it in the business world, to buy a really nice apartment with a great view.

Of course, they don't have time for chores, so they hire a housekeeper.

And you know what? The housekeeper is there from 9am til 9pm, 6 days a week - sitting in their luxurious couches, taking in the gorgeous seaside view, and enjoying the air-conditioning while their boss slaves away at work!

When their boss was young, they probably dreamed of building a life for themselves. But expectations don't always match reality!

See this world and its systems & institutions promise that if we just do the right things and live the right way, we can become powerful, wealthy, healthy, and successful - we can really live!

But eventually you find it's full of empty promises. Expectations just don't match reality. We can end up feeling oppressed, jaded, regretful, and empty. We were sucked in, deceived by false promises.

This world and its broken systems promise much and deliver little. So this morning we'll learn to look past the world's counterfeits and find their true substance in the Gospel.

Review & Overview

Now, today we're finishing off our 3-week series on the Old Testament book of Nahum. Nahum was a prophet in the 7th century BC who prophesied judgment on the ancient empire of Assyria, and Nineveh, its capital city. This morning, we're in [Nahum 3](#).

Let's quickly go over the first seven verses, because they set the context for the rest of the chapter. Verses 1-7 are a funeral song, a mock lament over Nineveh - God sarcastically mourns for them because another nation has invaded them. But this funeral song was written before they've even been attacked! So here God is demonstrated that Nineveh is absolutely, definitely going to fall (Bailey 1999, 218-219).

But why?

Well in v4 God describes ancient Nineveh as a prostitute. Nowadays we're discouraged from using that word because it's considered derogatory - you're supposed to say "sex worker". But here it is *meant* to be derogatory - Assyria is not like a poverty-stricken woman who goes into prostitution just to feed her family. No, *this* "woman" is a predator.

She is bewitching, "alluring", enticing, like the white witch in the Chronicles of Narnia. She seduces you with her beauty, lulls you into a trance, and before you know it you've woken up chained in her dungeon.

You see, Assyria was a militarily and economic powerhouse. They would seduce the nations around them with the expectation of military protection and economic prosperity. But the reality was depressing - these smaller vassal states were forced to send their young men to fight Assyria's wars and Assyria economically burdened them with heavy tribute. Also they spiritually enslaved them with the idolatry and witchcraft of Assyria's astrologers, sorcerers and magicians. They even attacked and oppressed God's people, Judah (Timmer 2020, 153-154)!

So what our just and holy God do?

In vv5-7 he prophesies Assyria's punishment with a sentence that was common for such prostitutes in the ancient world: He will publicly expose her to shame and humiliate her. No more dresses or make-up. No more spells or seduction. No more false promises. He strips Assyria naked in bold, harsh daylight, revealing her to be an abuser, witch, and paper tiger (Timmer 2020, 155-157).

Now remember this is a metaphor - he's talking about Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, not a real woman.

And around a century earlier God had sent another prophet, Jonah, to warn Nineveh that unless they repent of their evil, oppressive ways, God would judge them. On some level they did

repent so God forgave them. But soon they returned to their old ways. So here in Nahum there is no more mercy, only judgment (Timmer 2020, 179-180).

True Power

State the Point

Now, my first point this morning is that we can only receive true power through the Gospel, which is God's saving message about Jesus.

Show from the Bible

Assyria thought real power is all about human military might. If you have a large enough army, you're the boss, right?

But what's the use in controlling other people if you can't even control yourself? Their kings were filled with arrogant boasts. They were greedy, corrupt, and oppressive. Sure, they had military power, but *they* were enslaved by their own selfish desires. So they ended up using their power for evil.

And because they were evil, their power didn't last - God determined to judge them. In [Nahum 3:8-11](#), we see God compares Nineveh to another ancient city, Thebes. Thebes had fortifications, she had the Nile river and cliffs protecting her! But years earlier Assyria had invaded and decimated her (Timmer 2020, 158-159). So God says to Assyria: "what makes you think that won't happen to you too?"

And in vv12-13, God taunts Assyria's military. Now Assyria had the mightiest military the world had ever seen. Yet to God, their fortifications are just like fruit that you can shake off a tree right into your mouth! They're no match for *his* power.

Then in vv14-15, he mocks their battle preparations. Its like he's saying "prepare all you want, but when my judgment comes, it won't make a difference!"

Assyria couldn't control their own evil desires, so they used their power for evil. In so doing, they opposed God, the judge of the universe. And *that* is a fatal mistake.

Explain

But that's why *all* human empires never last! The Babylonians, the Greeks and Seleucids, the Romans, the British, and so on. They're undone by their hubris, immorality, and infighting. They often persecute God's people. So God makes sure they don't last.

You see, true power is first about being able to control yourself. Not just with exercise and dieting, but also saying no to evil desires like greed, lust, envy, anger, and hate. Its about directing your *whole* thought life and resources towards loving God, towards love, peace, generosity, service to others.

None of us are born with that kind of power - God works that in us through the Gospel.

But true power is *also* about being on the right team. In Nahum God shows himself to be stronger the mighty Assyrian army! He can craft a universe with his words, form blazing supernovas in an instant, and destroy entire human empires. And the only way to get on *his* team is to believe in his Gospel message.

True power is only found in the Gospel.

Illustrate

I remember moments when each of my daughters were two or three, and we'd be sitting in the car waiting for something - perhaps for our coffee at McDonalds. And I'd hold them on my lap in the driver's seat with the engine off. Now of course she'd start pressing buttons, turning the steering wheel, and she's thinking - *far out*, I'm driving the car! Her eyes light up and she gets all excited and giddy.

But of course she isn't *really* driving the car - I've got the keys. She can make the car do *some* things but I'm not going to switch on the engine and hand her the keys, am I? She *thinks* she has real power, but its just her imagination.

That's what worldly power is like. Yes, human rulers can have some impact, but only so far as God allows it, and what they *think* is true power is a fake substitute, not the real thing.

Apply

Just like the Assyrians, this world tries to seduce us to think power is found in military might, climbing the corporate ladder, or politics. But when God utters this judgment on Assyria, he exposes that as a fake.

Maybe we try to get power by speaking to spirits or the dead, or bewitching or cursing people, or through psychics, fortune-telling or astrology. Or maybe we use sexual favours to get money, influence people, or even blackmail them. But in [Nahum 3](#) God exposes all such witchcraft and sexual practices as evil.

If you have done these things, the Gospel offers us God's forgiveness - you're never too sinful for his grace. And whatever you're seeking in those practices, you'll find the real thing in Jesus.

You see, through the Gospel, can be set free from our evil desires. And one day when Christ returns from heaven, he will fully and finally cleanse his followers - we will be in total control of ourselves.

And, get this: he will appoint us as kings and queens over this world *forever*. Because our evil desires will be gone, our rule will have a *good* effect on the world. *That's* true power.

So don't worry about bullies, dictators, and oppressors who seem powerful and set themselves up against God and his people. Instead, focus on the Gospel, because that's where *true* power is found.

True Prosperity

State the Point

Secondly this morning, we can only enjoy true *prosperity* through the Gospel.

Show from the Bible

[Nahum 3:15-16](#), says, "...Multiply like grasshoppers, multiply like locusts! You have increased the number of your merchants till they are more numerous than the stars in the sky, but like locusts they strip the land and then fly away."

Nineveh was economically prosperous because they plundered other nations, then subjugated them under heavy tribute. They multiplied their merchants, their traders, and they were enjoying rich prosperity.

But Nahum prophesies that when invasion hits, they'll be like locusts - they'll all fly away, and they'll take their riches with them. Nineveh will be economically devastated (Timmer 2020, 165-170).

Explain

And this has been the case through all of human history. The Great Depression followed WW1. There were severe rations in Britain during and after WW2.

More recently we had the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, COVID-19, and the recent inflation and housing affordability crisis. People can feel like they're getting on ok, but soon they're left high and dry. It can happen to anyone.

Nineveh delighted in their wealth and they found security in it, just like many of us. But you see prosperity can disappear so easily!

But in our 1 Peter reading, it says Christ's followers are given "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power..."

See, the Gospel promises us riches, just like the world does. But there's a couple of differences.

The first difference is that the world promises us riches *now*, but the Gospel promises us riches *later* - when Christ returns.

The second difference is that the world seduces us with temporary, uncertain riches that only last *until we die*, or maybe not - maybe you don't actually get what you want, or maybe they're suddenly taken away from you.

But the Gospel promises us *certain* riches that we'll enjoy *forever*. Our inheritance can never "perish, spoil, or fade." Why? Because *God* guards it for us! Who is going to take them off *him*?

What good is it to have wealth that you could lose at any moment through natural disaster, theft, economic downturn, or death? Nineveh soon realised the folly of that. It is far better to wait to receive secure, *eternal* riches from God himself. That's true prosperity!

Illustrate

Have you heard of the marshmallow test?

It was a social media craze where a mum puts a marshmallow in front of their small child. And they'll say, "I'm just going out of the room for 5 minutes, and if this marshmallow is still here when I get back, I'll give you another marshmallow too!"

And this poor little lab rat has to wait an agonising 5 minutes staring at this marshmallow, and the marshmallow is staring back at them, and meanwhile their mum gleefully watches their torment through a hidden camera. And if they wait patiently, when mum finally comes back they get to eat *two* marshmallows.

Apply

When the world tempts us with riches, its a little bit like that. Sure, *maybe*, you can have prosperity in this life. But you could lose it at any moment, and you can't take it with you when you die.

But if we wait and trust in Jesus, focussing on doing his will, when Jesus returns he will reward us with a secure inheritance *forever*.

The Bible says that whoever gives to the poor loans to God, and he will repay. And whoever invests in his kingdom, *he* will pay them back with interest in the next life. The Gospel frees us up to be generous and openhanded with our money now, because what we give isn't truly lost - God guards it for us.

So don't gaze enviously at the shiny trinkets this world dangles in front of you - beautiful houses, new electric cars, gadgets, clothes, and holidays. Rather, trust in the promises of the Gospel and invest wisely.

True Life

State the Point

Thirdly, we can only enjoy true, fulfilling, permanent life through the Gospel.

Show from the Bible

In [Nahum 3:18-19](#), God says:

Nahum 3:18–19 NIV

¹⁸ King of Assyria, your shepherds slumber; your nobles lie down to rest. Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them.

¹⁹ Nothing can heal you; your wound is fatal...

Back in the 8th and 7th centuries BC, the Assyrian empire seemed to be here to stay - permanent, untouchable. It promised the good life - the king was like a shepherd that defended his citizens and allies from any danger.

If you trust in Assyria and play along, you could live your best life!

Do you think they expected to be invaded and conquered? If they'd heard Nahum's prophecy, would they have believed it? They would have laughed in his face!

But we know from history that this prophecy was fulfilled only a few years after it was uttered. The Babylonians invaded Assyria in 612 BC and decimated Nineveh.

Now, their promises of permanence and life ring hollow, don't they?

Explain

But our world and its institutions are no different. Our text calls ancient *Nineveh* the city of bloodshed, but look around today! We've got needless wars, widespread corruption-induced starvation, and more and more abortion, euthanasia, and murder. So much senseless taking of precious life. This evil world promises life but delivers so much death.

And how many scientific studies, pharmaceutical companies, and health plans are thrown at us daily offering to extend our lives by just that much? How many products are marketed at our drive for fulfilment and satisfaction?

But we know one day we will die, even though we try to avoid the issue. We try to extend our lives, to make them more comfortable, to try to somehow find fulfilment, but eventually it all starts to feel a little pointless. Transient. This world bewitches us with its promises of life, but soon we experience the sickening taste of a counterfeit, cheap imitation.

You'll never find true fulfilment in the world because you weren't designed to live for yourself, but rather for the God who gave you life.

You see, God himself took on a human nature and was born into this world as a Jewish man 2000 years ago - Jesus of Nazareth. He willingly chose to hang on a Roman crucifix. The Son of God, the author of life, *died*.

But God the Father raised Jesus from the dead - he was resurrected in his physical body. But *this* version is immortal. Supernatural. *Powerful*.

Whoever trusts and follows him will be resurrected like him and enjoy eternal life. Permanence. Security. True fulfilment, the kind you get when you discover your true place in the world. We'll live how we were always intended to - in paradise, in renewed relationship with the life-giving God who made us.

Apply

So don't set your hopes for the good life on false promises from the world: the latest diet or private health plan or promising career. Rather, trust in the author of life, who passed through death and came out the other side. That's where true life is found.

Conclusion

2000 years ago, in first-century Palestine, a Jewish man was put on trial. When he was arrested, his hundreds of followers abandoned him. The Roman governor stood over him, looking him up and down, while the crowds outside riotously jeered for his execution.

The governor asks, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Some king, right? The governor has thousands of soldiers, he has no-one.

But the Jew answers, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight... But now my kingdom is from another place.”

Then the governor asks: “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”

And the Jew answers, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”

This Jew, of course, is Jesus, the Son of God. He knows its not about the soldiers, the weapons, the armour, or the status. Rather, Jesus has the power to control himself, humble himself, and love us so much that he was willing to be executed on a cross, shamed, naked in front of everyone.

At the time, it didn’t *look* like he was in control. But because he was on the right team, after three days God raised his body to life and seated him in heaven as true king - immortal, powerful, sovereign over everything. *That’s* true power.

Before, he was forsaken, without a possession or friend in the world. But now he owns *everything* and infallibly gives it to whomever he pleases - *that’s* true prosperity.

Because he willingly endured death, anyone who believes can come to him for forgiveness. We can live forever with him in new bodies like his, basking in the glorious presence of God. *That’s* true life.

God exposed Assyria’s counterfeit promises of power, prosperity, and life, shaming them in front of the entire world. But Jesus bore *our* shame on the cross. And three days later he was vindicated by his powerful resurrection from the dead.

So don’t chase the lies, the trinkets, the counterfeits of this evil world. God will one day judge, expose and shame it. Rather, you’ll find true power, prosperity, and life partially now, fully later when we pursue the *real things* in Christ and his Gospel.

Let’s pray.

Confession & Assurance

You know, many of us sitting here chased the counterfeits this world offers and its left us high and dry. And maybe in the process we’ve found ourselves doing evil things, things that we regret. And we know that God judges evil.

Well the Gospel, the good news, is that God sent Jesus to offer us the real thing - he offers us peace, reconciliation with God. Through his death he offers us eternal life. In 1 Peter it says the end result of faith, of believing, is salvation of your soul. If you want to repent of your evil deeds and believe and follow Jesus, please come and see me or Mike after the service and we'd be happy to tell you more about it, to hear your story, and pray with you.

If you're already a believer, we all still fall into the world's temptations sometimes, don't we? So let's take a few moments to confess our sins to God individually, and then we'll confess all together.

And if you've done that, we know that God promises to forgive those who confess their sins and believe. Just like [Hebrews 12:28](#) says God's kingdom cannot be shaken, his forgiveness can't be shaken or taken away. Unlike the world, *he* keeps his promises.

Now Greg is going to come up and lead us in prayer.

Bibliography

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