

I.N.I.

Sixth Sunday in Pentecost

July 4, 2010

Nahum 1:15-2:10

In Christ Jesus, the Defender and Refuge of His Church, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I'm going to test your memory. Do you remember the message of May 9th? Do you remember which prophet our sermon was based on? Now I don't really expect you to remember who the prophet was on that Mother's Day, but when I tell you, we should be able to recall the message from the Lord about that prophet. The prophet we studied on that Sunday morning was Jonah!

Does the mention of that name conger up in your mind thoughts of Jonah's refusal to proclaim God's Word to a mighty enemy nation; of his fleeing before the Lord by taking a ship east to Tarshish; of his being thrown into the sea and being swallowed by a large fish; of his beautiful prayer of repentance and trust in the Lord while in the smelly belly of that fish; of his miraculous deliverance (being vomited up on dry ground); and of his going to Nineveh to proclaim the Word? But does it also bring to mind God's great grace and mercy not only shown to Jonah but also to the wicked people of Nineveh. When the Word proclaimed by Jonah moved them to repent of their evil deeds God spared them all? In Jonah 3:10 we read: **THEN GOD SAW THEIR WORKS, THAT THEY TURNED FROM THEIR EVIL WAY; AND GOD RELENTED FROM THE DISASTER THAT HE HAD SAID HE WOULD BRING UPON THEM, AND HE DID NOT DO IT.**

That was 150 years ago; 150 years before Nahum's writing. And now 150 years later we see that Nineveh's repentance was short-lived. The people had returned to their wicked, evil, immoral and cruel ways. When the Lord used the Assyrians to destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel they treated the Israelites cruelly and instead of recognizing that God was using them as His instrument for punishing unbelieving, unrepentant Israel; these Assyrians rejoiced and boasted in their own pride and strength.

The book of Nahum has but one theme: "Nineveh, the haughty, proud capital of the Assyrian kingdom will be destroyed; will be brought to an end." God's patience finally ran out and this time there is no sparing.

In chapter 1 Nahum describes God's power and wrath toward His enemies. He also displays God's patience, goodness and protection for those who seek refuge in Him. In chapter 3 the Lord through Nahum lists the many iniquities and evil deeds that makes Nineveh's destruction inevitable.

Our text this morning seems to be full of gloom and doom, a message of only despair and destruction---yet the lesson which we should learn from the destruction of Nineveh and apply to our lives is one of grace, mercy and glory. We see that---

NINEVAH'S DESTRUCTION

I: Insured Judah's salvation

II: Is a preview of Judgment Day

Again the first verse of our text reads: **BEHOLD, ON THE MOUNTAINS THE FEET OF HIM WHO BRINGS GOOD TIDINGS, WHO PROCLAIMS PEACE! O JUDAH, KEEP YOUR APPOINTED FEASTS, PERFORM YOUR VOWS. FOR THE WICKED ONE SHALL NO MORE PASS THROUGH YOU; HE IS UTTERLY CUT OFF.**

Nahum paints the picture of a military courier racing back from the battlefield to deliver good news to the King and people of Judah. The battle is won. The enemy is defeated, Judah is free! Keep your feasts and festivals, Judah! Fulfill your vows!

Both Isaiah and Nahum had foretold the destruction of Assyria that would happen prior to the coming of the Messiah as a guarantee, a promise of the ultimate destruction of all of the enemies of the Church and of the salvation of God's people.

The destruction of Nineveh and the Assyrians assured Judah as it assures us today that it is the LORD God who is in charge of history—it is indeed **HIS STORY!** And **HIS STORY** always revolves around Christ. He is the heart and center of history. The Lord allows the wicked, unbelieving people and nations of this world to go only so far and no further. He does this always for the protection and benefit of His people---the Church of believers. What a great comfort to know that God will go to all lengths to protect His own, yes, even changing the course of history which He has done time and time again.

This prophecy of Nineveh's destruction insured Judah's salvation. Their enemy, not only the Assyrians, but every enemy of God's people would be defeated---the unbelievers, the heretics, the believers of false gods, the atheists, agnostics, hypocrites, the Anti-Christ, and Satan himself. Those who fight against and seek to destroy the Church are really fighting a losing battle because they are fighting against the Almighty God of heaven and earth. Those who dare to oppose His Church; its teachings and what it stands for, no matter how powerful the individual, the nation or the organization shall be destroyed. Even the greatest enemy of the Church and of God, Satan, has been crushed by Jesus' redemptive Sacrifice on the cross and resurrection from the dead and will be forever doomed with his own when Christ comes again to judge all of mankind.

How comforting this message was to the believers of Nahum's day and what a great comfort for us. The anti-Christian groups of today who seek to destroy God's Word and Church will not win. Nothing will outlast Christianity and escape God's judgment. Of that we are assured, and that surety of the defeat of our enemies also assures us of our salvation through our Conqueror and Victor Jesus Christ.

That brings us to the second truth we learn from Nineveh's destruction.

II: It is a preview of Judgment Day

Man holds the view that **MIGHT MAKES RIGHT!** If you are the strongest bully on the block you get your way. If you are the most powerful organization you usually get your way. If you are the most powerful nation you make sure you get your way. Well, if ever there was a nation who deserved the title, "most likely to survive" Assyria was the one. From a human viewpoint it was indestructible. It had a large, powerful army of soldiers, horses and chariots. They had vast resources, fortified defenses. The capital Nineveh was over 1 million strong with an 8 mile circumference completely surrounded by thick walls. Yet what do we hear Nahum saying? Vs. 1-3: **HE WHO SCATTERS HAS COME UP BEFORE YOUR FACE. MAN THE FORT! WATCH THE ROAD! STRENGTHEN YOUR FLANKS! FORTIFY YOUR POWER MIGHTILY. FOR THE LORD WILL RESTORE THE EXCELLENCE OF JACOB LIKE THE EXCELLENCE OF ISRAEL, FOR THE EMPTIERS HAVE EMPTIED THEM OUT AND RUINED THEIR VINE BRANCHES. THE SHIELDS OF HIS MIGHTY MEN ARE MADE RED, THE VALIANT MEN ARE IN SCARLET. THE CHARIOTS COME WITH FLAMING TORCHES IN THE DAY OF HIS PREPARATION, AND THE SPEARS ARE BRANDISHED.** Can you picture it? It sounds like the movie Braveheart where Mel Gibson, playing the part of William Wallace, encourages his men to attack the larger and stronger English forces. What a bloody battle.

MAN THE FORT! WATCH THE ROAD! STRENGTHEN YOUR FLANKS! O you strong and mighty in heart and mind defend yourself against the attacker. But the attacker, literally the Scatterer is none other than the Lord God. And in 612 B.C. we see how this prophecy came to pass. The mighty Babylonian army attacked the Assyrian nation taking one city after another. Finally they assaulted powerful Nineveh dressed in their scarlet robes with their red shields.

Listen again to the words of Nahum and note the actions of a once mighty people---vs. 4-5: **THE CHARIOTS RAGE IN THE STREETS, THEY JOSTLE ONE ANOTHER IN THE BROAD ROADS; THEY SEEM LIKE TORCHES, THEY RUN LIKE LIGHTNING. HE REMEMBERS HIS NOBLES; THEY STUMBLE IN THEIR WALK; THEY MAKE HASTE TO HER WALLS, AND THE DEFENSE IS PREPARED.** But it is all to no avail. We read vs. 6-7: **THE GATES OF THE RIVERS ARE OPENED, AND THE PALACE IS DISSOLVED. IT IS DECREED: SHE**

SHALL BE LED AWAY CAPTIVE, SHE SHALL BE BROUGHT UP; AND HER MAIDSERVANTS SHALL LEAD HER AS WITH THE VOICE OF DOVES, BEATING THEIR BREASTS. The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses. This was not done by man but by God. For historians record that in the third year of Nineveh's siege by the Babylonians a series of heavy rains swelled the Tigris River so that it flooded part of the city and destroyed about two miles of the cities walls through which the Babylonians easily advanced. Man proposes---but God disposes!

This once great city of canals now shall drain away and the contents will be carried away. The people shall shout STOP! STOP! but no one will turn back.

In verse 10 we read: **SHE IS EMPTY, DESOLATE, AND WASTE! THE HEART MELTS, AND THE KNEES SHAKE; MUCH PAIN IS IN EVERY SIDE, AND ALL THEIR FACES ARE DRAINED OF COLOR.** The heart of the people, once so proud and fearless is now melted like wax. Despair grabs hold of them, they tremble, and their faces grow white in sickening fear and anguish. What countless thousands of their enemies had felt when they were defeated by the Assyrians, now these Assyrians felt for the first time.

Vs. 9: **TAKE SPOIL OF SILVER! TAKE SPOIL OF GOLD! THERE IS NO END OF TREASURE, OR WEALTH OF EVERY DESIRABLE PRIZE.** Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! The supply is endless. All of Nineveh's wealth and treasures are carried away or destroyed.

As we said in the year 612 B.C. all of what Nahum had prophesied came to pass. Racing horses, cracking whips, rattling chariot wheels rushing down the streets, bounding, careening through the parks and alleys of the mighty city. The Babylonians flashing their swords slaughtering thousands upon thousands so that heaps and heaps of bodies lay dead and the bloody city passed into oblivion.

So completely had this once great city and kingdom been destroyed that many scholars came to doubt the truth of God's Word found in Jonah, in Nahum and Zephaniah about Nineveh. They were looked upon as mythical stories of a land and of a people that really did not exist. It wasn't until 1820 (only 190 years ago) that an English archeologist sketched several huge mounds north of the Tigris River which he suspected were the ruins to this once magnificent yet bloody Empire. In 1845 the site was identified as the bloody city of Nineveh and since then palaces, libraries, houses, parks, and records have been found making the Assyrian kings household names in secular history; names of kings who for over 2,000 thousand years were only written about in the Bible.

In our second Scripture reading this morning we heard Jesus discuss the Judgment. This picture of Nineveh's great destruction is a preview of Judgment Day. Even as Nineveh relied on its strength, power and might and looked to its own resources so also unbelieving mankind looks to himself for his secure future. People store up money, buy insurance and invest heavily. Some put their confidence in their country's defenses and bigger armies with more deadly weapons. Others trust in their wisdom and intellect to secure their future, while still others rely on peace treaties and world's environmental regulations to provide a secure future.

Is anyone listening to the Lord God and His call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ?

Even as everything suddenly came to an end for Nineveh so will it be for the mighty nations and peoples of this world. On the last day there too will be anguish, distress, ruin and destruction the likes of which has never been seen before. Great cities, huge skyscrapers and magnificent bridges that man has built and gloried in will crumble down. Zephaniah says: **IN THE FIRE OF HIS JEALOUSY THE WHOLE WORLD WILL BE CONSUMED, FOR HE WILL MAKE A SUDDEN END OF ALL WHO LIVE IN THE EARTH."** (NIV)

Everything will come to a sudden stop! Time will cease—for eternity will have begun when Christ returns. The world will be making its usual cry of "more, more, more" but the Lord will declare "**NO MORE!**"

God will put up with no more on that last day. The only escape is trusting in the Lord Jesus, for He is our refuge. Seek the Lord! Seek righteousness, not a righteousness of our own for we have none. We have only sin and death in us. But righteousness which stands before God is Christ's righteousness—

His perfect life; His atoning sacrifice; His resurrection amounts to our Justification. Seek humility! For faith can only live in a humble heart of repentance.

What a tremendous message for us. Mighty Nineveh has fallen and is destroyed. Someday all of this proud world will come to an end too. May we be found in the shelter of our Savior's shed blood. May we with humble hearts continue to come before our Lord to repent of our sins and seek full forgiveness in Christ.

“O Christ, who died and yet dost live, to me impart Thy merit; my pardon seal, my sins forgive, and cleanse me by Thy Spirit.

Beneath Thy cross I view the day when heav'n and earth shall pass away and thus prepare to meet Thee.”

Amen.