

Sermon on Nahum prepared by Jonathan Shradar

YouVersion events... Stand for the word.

Jesus is our refuge.

Nahum 1:1-15

Jesus is our refuge.

A couple of weeks ago I listened to a podcast on our historical moment and what it means for the church of Jesus. It was a long survey of recent history and the shifts in global dominance, but what has stuck with me was the host's reference to the ending American Century.

Devised as a way to imagine the world in the wake of WWII by the Council on Foreign Relations, the roadmap called for global influence, or dominance through military, technological, and arguably moral superiority. As he unpacked the Cold War and our constant need of "them," an enemy of all that is good and right, it was a little chilling. But what struck me as an unpopular opinion was his claim that the century was soon over. A waning superpower, once at the "center" shifting to something different.

As compared to Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome... UK. And in the future, China should the Lord tarry.

This, paired with a study of the Minor Prophets, has had me zooming out quite a bit, trying to let the long arc of history shape my approach to the present.

"The stage of history is large. Larger-than-life figures appear on this stage from time to time, swaggering about, brandishing weapons and money, terrorizing and bullying. These figures are not, as they suppose themselves to be, at the center of the stage - not, in fact, anywhere near the center. But they call attention to themselves and often manage to get a significant number of people watching and even admiring them. At any given moment, a few superpower nations and their rulers dominate the daily news. Every century a few of these names are left carved on its park benches, marking rather futile, and in retrospect pitiable, attempts at immortality." EP

Nahum speaks to just such a nation. One that stood in opposition to God and his people. A power that claimed to be the center of existence. But they won't survive. The true center takes his place over all that oppose him. And there is a refuge, a safe place, a sanctuary, for those who trust in him.

Nahum is a unique prophet. An oracle concerning Nineveh. The nation you will remember from our study of Jonah. This was the place that the fishy prophet called to repentance. It is the same place and people, just a generation later. The great capital of the Assyrian empire. The dominating power, too big to fail.

Assyria conquered and reigned with hubris as if none had come before and none would follow after. They were the end all be all.

Spoken around 660-630 BC, Nahum of Elkosh (from southern Judah) confronts the empire that holds at that moment Israel in exile. It is an aggressive book. Judgment, destruction, and woe called upon the enemy of God. The resolution is their end.

As we hear of the coming wrath and vengeance of the LORD, we gain some insight into God himself. And that has been our goal in this series, to hear what the prophets say of God.

Jesus is our refuge. How do we get there?

Those opposed to God always fail.

Israel is in exile, so they had "failed" in a sense. Disobedient to God and his covenant with them. And as we have already heard, exile is punishment but also the place of rescue for God's own.

But Assyria is worse off because they stand against God. The nation has claimed for itself the center of the universe - something that belongs only to God.

They have shamed God's people. They are violent. There is a disregard, disrespect, and aggressive violence toward God - treated as some substandard deity - and it will be their ruin.

Nahum 3:1-7 “Woe to the bloody city, all full of lies and plunder— no end to the prey! [2] The crack of the whip, and rumble of the wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot! [3] Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, hosts of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end— they stumble over the bodies! [4] And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms.

[5] Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame. [6] I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. [7] And all who look at you will shrink from you and say, “Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve for her?” Where shall I seek comforters for you?” (ESV)

Wrath against sin. The LORD is taking vengeance on his adversaries and the enemies of his people. His way is the whirlwind and storm and the clouds are the dust of his feet. The One who controls nature is powerful and none can stand against him.

Nahum 3:19 “There is no easing your hurt; your wound is grievous. All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?” (ESV)

You can't oppose God. You will fail.

There is a clear outcome. But still, Nahum means “comfort.” Spoken to Assyria, heard by Israel, and kept as a reminder of how God deals with his enemies.

Israel, in exile, needs hope. This is their comfort. Those that oppress them, that shame them, will be destroyed. This is the light at the end of the tunnel.

I suppose we can claim that same comfort. When it seems evil has its day and way, God is still on the throne and will ruin all that oppose him. Vindication is coming.

But it should also stand as a warning and quickening for us.

Nineveh is a type. This city represents systems, governments, groups, and individuals that oppose the Lord and his people. That reject his place as the center and attempt to capture it for themselves.

Ephesians 2:2-3 “...following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—[3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (ESV)

The way of opposition won't last. It is destruction. We need something that lasts.

We have a human hunger for good things that last. [Charlie and the Chocolate Factory - everlasting gobstopper. It is appealing because the flavor remains, it lasts forever!]

Nahum, in the negative, by showing how the course of the world won't last, points to and pulls God's people back to him and a lasting kingdom, a kingdom opened to all, a kingdom worth giving ourselves to.

While not explicit - repentance is the only option.

Nineveh did it before, turned from wickedness to the LORD. It's the sign of Jonah. Saying no to sin and opposition and saying yes to something better.

We live still in the age of Jonah, when you can turn and come to God in repentance, renouncing your rebellion to him. But this prophet tells us that the age of Nahum is coming and judgment will have the last word for those who never turn.

So we that recognize our opposition can turn in repentance - and when we do, we find our safe haven for life.

The LORD is a refuge.

The prophet leads with promise. “The LORD is slow to anger and great in power...” 1:3

Nahum 1:7 “The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.” (ESV)

We know what happens to his adversaries... this is who he is toward those who trust him, run to him, and see him as the center. He is a hiding place in tough times. He recognizes and welcomes anyone looking for help...

When we turn to the real center, where he is, we find redemption, security, safety, real life! Repentance is the way of rescue in the face of rampant opposition to God.

And the security comes with the promise of an end of affliction and the breaking of yokes of slavery off of you. Brought by the One announcing the Kingdom, good news.

Nahum 1:15 “Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off.” (ESV)

This is Jesus.

He took on humanity, in order to live obediently before the Father in our place, and he preached the arrival of the Kingdom and the way of life with God as the center. It unsettles the adversaries, the Devil tries to tempt him, the religious call him a heretic, and Rome sentences him to death.

Jesus took on all the shame for us. He owns it on the cross for us.

Psalm 22:7 “All who see me mock me; they wag their mouths at me; they wag their heads;” (ESV)

The Savior who endured the cross, despising the shame, because on the other side was salvation for all who believe.

We know something of shame, sometimes because of our own sin. Other times because we have been sinned against. Our great Savior, took on all of it so that all those who look to him can be assured of the end, someday very soon, of all shame.

Think of your shame right now, whatever it is (sin, brokenness, words, situation), and realize that because you have claimed Jesus as your refuge, that shame is his. He lifts that burden from you. And loves you, welcomes you with open arms and a smile.

He is for you.

"Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection, has brought the ultimate end of every human authority opposed to God. He conquered not by killing but by being killed. The result is that one day every knee will bow, either in worship or under his rod of iron. For those who have taken refuge in him, we don't know the answer to how long we have to wait, but we know that salvation has come and is coming in Jesus." GTB

He is now the One to judge, and all Ninevehs will fall before him.

Acts 17:30–31 “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (ESV)

But for those that have come to him for salvation, to whom he is a refuge, we rest in his finished work for us. No longer following the course of the world because...

Ephesians 2:4–10 “...God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (ESV)

Jesus is our refuge and there is none like him. Once and for all. From his grace we find life, purpose, and community.

"All will be set right. We can be hopeful and patient. The gospel frees us not only from God's just claims against us but from the dominion of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. In saving, God overthrows and destroys dominions that are opposed to his rule and oppress his people." GTB

He is our home.

This **gives us peace while we wait**. That the enemies of God and his people will be destroyed. The One who publishes peace is our refuge.

It also **gives us purpose while we wait**. Sent to call those that oppose God to repentance. As agents of reconciliation calling systems, movements, nations, and people to turn to the center of all things, the only true refuge.

Jesus is our refuge, may many more find the same hope.

In the arc of history, many nations have come and gone, many more will come and meet the same end. There is, however, a lasting Kingdom. And the King is a friend of mine... Take refuge in Jesus. Surrender yourself to him and his way.

Live as a citizen of his kingdom for your good and his glory. That you would know the good stronghold, keeping you forever.