

Reading: Nahum 1:1-8

Theme: Three Things God Wants Us to Know.

We are living in confusing and uncertain times. Covid-19, this coronavirus has plunged us into times not really known since the Spanish Flu in 1918. It has affected international travel and travel within nations. People are in lockdown situations locally nationally, as well as throughout the world and we have just seen schools closed for an indefinite period. The stock markets, financial markets, pension pots and world currency have all been affected. People make various guesses as to how it will affect the world situation and none can agree on the number of fatalities there could be.

Besides the physical illness and trauma, many people seem to be affected emotionally, mentally and even psychologically as they fear and imagine the situations which they, their loved ones, their friends and society could be plunged into. Some people shrug it off as being overhyped; others are in panic mode - both in their buying habits and their behaviour. We are told much we need to know, but sadly there is also much disinformation and even misinformation designed to cause us to panic and cause us to become victims to scams. There are things we need to know that relate to basic hygiene practices. Our grandson actually questioned why is it that people don't know how to wash their hands correctly and what were they doing before!!

The books of Jonah and Nahum both centre upon the city of Nineveh, but written 150 years apart. In Jonah the city is spared destruction from God - the book is about God's mercy and forgiveness. In Nahum, we see Nineveh's judgement and destruction foretold - the book is about God's judgement and wrath. It is solemn to realise that God, who graciously spared the city and Assyrian Empire before, was moved to anger at their wrong, their sin and ignoring Him. The people of Judah lived in confusing and uncertain times too! Yet through such confusing and uncertain times, God would help His people. There is a message of comfort and consolation to God's own people. Note that the name Nahum means "*Consolation, Comforter*" - for God's people. Let's note 3 things from v7 which God wants us to personally know:

1. The Lord is Good.

God wants us to know this attribute or aspect of His character. He emphasises, shows this to the first hearers and to all since - He, the Lord, is good. He draws our attention to this glorious truth set against the awesome and terrifying portrayal of the Lord as Judge in this book. We learn He is

against His enemies - those who would oppose Him and His people. To be honest, it is a terrifying picture of the Almighty, the awesome God coming in judgement against His enemies and showing their doom and destruction. Previously the Assyrians knew God's mercy and may have assumed they were fine, but did not realise v2 & 3, v6 - which should cause all to fear – for those verses picture judgement, destruction of Nineveh by the Lord - which the rest of the book describes in pictorially graphic detail.

Although at the moment things seem chaotic, confusing, and uncertain in society, even fearful and uncertain in our own personal circumstances and lives. Our comfort and consolation is to be "*The Lord is good*". This is the attribute of God highlighted, emphasised for us to note. God's goodness is one of His moral attributes alongside His holiness and righteousness. These are said to be the most glorious of His divine perfections. Not that they are more perfect or glorious compared to any other attribute of God, but as related to mankind - these moral attributes shine with a comforting splendour of their own. One of the most splendid and glorious attributes is this goodness of God.

"*The Lord is good*" - this speaks of God being good in and of Himself. He is good in all His perfections - perfect, no fault or blemish or weakness. Good in all His actions and the motives of those actions. God is good for all His creation and is the Fountain of all good that exists. All that creation knows and enjoys as true good, flows from this inexhaustible Fountain of God's goodness. God is good to all His creation, He sends the sun and the rain on the righteous and the unrighteous; sends health and strength, sickness and sorrows, gives minds, provisions etc. to people irrespective of their righteousness or unrighteousness before God. His goodness works out in His benevolence, His kindness. It is because of His goodness that those who do great sins, or who deny God and mock Him are not struck down instantly, but they live and even prosper. Perhaps that is true of someone listening, you know of God, yet live careless of Him - no thought of doing anything to please or honour Him and certainly do not believe on Him and live in His ways. Yet in these days you have a fear of what might happen to you if...

Imagine we could examine God in minute detail - we would never find one hidden part in Him that was not good. Astronomers have studied the sun and found there are spots and blemishes on it, but look as we would, we would never find anything wrong with or a fault in and with God. An out working of His goodness is His love. This is the source of His dealing with us as

human beings - His goodness expressed to us is viewed as the high characteristic of love. We are to realise God has a love for all mankind as the highest point of His creation - His benevolent love, goodness, yet the love I'm speaking of here is that special redemptive love which He has only for His people - especially shown in NT - where we see this revealed to those who have received, trusted the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. It is to these alone that He has this love in its richest and fullest sense. These and these alone can most truly say "*The Lord is good*".

These have tasted that the Lord is good. An out working of His goodness is His grace and His mercy. Such have been made known and shown to people who do not deserve it - as they have come to trust Him as their Saviour. God's goodness is the basis of His long-suffering and patience toward those who are His enemies and also to those who are His people. God is good and so He is slow to anger. Because of this He is to be feared - for we could neglect or ignore His goodness, patience and end up suffering His punishment.

The attribute of the Lord's goodness is an active attribute and affects all He is and does. His works, His providences are good, holy and right. This is not always easy to recognise and own when we are on the receiving end of God's mysterious working out things in our lives. That is why it is difficult in our limited understanding to make sense of this world pandemic at the moment. Personally, we would always want to have sunny days, a trouble-free journey through life, but we find troubles, trials, afflictions, illnesses, bereavements, pain, sorrow, confusion and the like coming our way. Yet it still stands "*The Lord is good*". He knows the way He is **deliberately** taking and leading us as His children in a fallen and suffering world and what He will achieve in us and through us in such situations. Our gains and losses, our triumphs and crosses, our coronaviruses are all of His goodness, for we read in Romans 8:28 "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.*" It does not say it is for our good in that situation, but it works to the good end and purpose God has – we may never understand that good or purpose this side of heaven, but in heaven will praise Him for what He did in and through our lives.

God is good to His people and always acts consistently with who He is and what He is like. His love, wisdom and all-knowing never allows Him to make a mistake. Our present and our future, as has been our past, is safely in His hands. Nahum could comfort and console God's people in difficult, hard

times and would direct people to note *“The Lord is good”*. I would also do the same for us this morning as we face much uncertainty and confusion in society and in our own lives and our families. We will do well to think much on this glorious truth - treat it as a lovely sweet and suck on it often, to regularly enjoy that the Lord is good. Also, God wants us to know:

2. The Lord is a Stronghold or Refuge.

Great and awesome things would happen as the Assyrian empire fell. Little Judah may have feared for her safety and existence as they were weak, helpless, ineffective and in a little backwater part of the world’s empires. They had no strength or defence in and of themselves and yet the Lord encourages His people where to look for their protection - to Him as a refuge, a stronghold, a fortress in the day of trouble. My early life was in Caerphilly and less than a mile away was Caerphilly Castle – I went to it many times. It was one of the last and finest castles of its day. The Romans built a fort here in Doncaster (Danum = place by the river Don) - Danum’s 2nd fort was built from timber about 70AD for 500 soldiers. It was demolished in the 2nd century AD. Later on, Doncaster Castle was built on the same site and when troubles arose, people headed into such places for their safety. It was the centre of life and attention, a symbol of hope, but its true value and worth was known and seen in times of trouble.

Things will not always be easy in our lives and we are in troubled, uncertain and confusing days. In addition, the devil will stir things up as we live in a fallen world. The world will hate us because it hates and blames our Saviour and God - yet we are to still live for Him, to tell of Him to those who need to believe or be lost. Even though we try to do them the ultimate good, they will hate us for it. Into our lives can come *“the day of trouble”* – as we are in at this time! Yet the Lord assures us of His ability to protect us, guide us, keep us if we flee to Him as our refuge, our stronghold in the day of trouble. We are directed to this glorious truth in Psalm 46:1-3 and in Proverbs 18:10 *“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.”*

The Lord pictures Himself as a stronghold, a refuge in any day of trouble and so shows His people they would not always have things easy. The Lord wants us to know that also! What a place of eternal safety and protection we have to flee to, to enter into. I need to ask you, where will **you** go for your protection and safety in the days, the times of trouble? The ultimate day of trouble will be the day of our death which will come to us all. We do not

know when or how it will come upon us, nor have any time to get right with God or seek His help and eternal safety. That is why the Bible, I and other preachers urge you to go to that place of safety now, while it is called today. Then we can know His eternal protection as He welcomes us as His child and we are safe and secure within the love and salvation of the God of heaven by trusting the Lord Jesus as our Saviour.

Even as Christians we may still have many trials and days of troubles, even suffer Covid-19 personally; we may not understand why these things come upon us. Just as the power and the love of God will keep us, we can also go to the wisdom of God and rest there because He knows why such things occur in our lives even when we cannot make sense of things, but ultimately we go to *“The Lord is good”* and in His good power, wisdom, love, grace and mercy this has been allowed to come upon us. Yes, we may be confused, weak, helpless, even question *“Why?”* yet we are to take our refuge in the Lord, who is working all things together for good to those who love Him, as those who are called according to His purpose.

It may not appear to be good, a temporary good or fleeting good, but it is working eternal good in us, even through us; a good we may never see or recognise in this life, yet it will be a good we will own in heaven and praise God for such. At this moment we are short-sighted, have such poor expectations and desires, but our God sees the end from the beginning and He wants us to be safe in Him and His guardian care. We are to consciously put our nation, our own lives, families, church and futures in God’s care and keeping - even as we face the Covid-19 pandemic. In theory this is no hard thing, but in practice it is not so easy! We all have our dreams, plans, fears and anxieties. We all want many good things to occur to us, yet may feel that by putting our whole life and being into God’s care and keeping, it means He can do with us as He wants and we may fear that could be contrary to our natural tendencies. Yet He is good and His goodness is our only true place of peace, safety and protection in all the way He will lead us.

He will never lead us where His grace, strength and love cannot keep us. Ultimately the only wise thing we can do is to consciously commit our all to Him; to have Him lead us, guide us, protect us no matter where He knows it is best for us to be and go. In this way we are to glorify and enjoy our God most fully. His leading, guiding and protection of us is not as some General

sat in office miles away and remote from his troops on a battlefield, as we see God not only wants us to know His Character and Protection, but also:

3. The Lord Lovingly Knows Us.

The Lord knows, cares for those who trust in Him. The word for “*knows, cares*” is a powerful word, a dynamic word and it is more than have a knowledge of, know about or be acquainted with. It is a great and intimate knowledge. It is used in OT KJV translation for the completing of knowledge and intimacy in marriage - *so and so knew his wife*. It speaks of a tender, intimate knowledge. The NIV “*cares*” tries to get at that idea. The Lord has an intimate personal knowledge of each of all those who have trusted in Him through the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows all about us, our situations, our worries, fears, aches, pains, ups and downs now. He not only knows about us, but He knows us and He cares for us, He loves us as we are, with all our weaknesses, blemishes, faults and failings. Perhaps we fear that people would not bother with us if they knew what we were really like. Well, God does and He loves us still! He knows everything about us - every good or wrong secret desire, thought, word, action, fear and yet if we have trusted Him, He loves us, knows us - even how many hairs we have on our head!

This God knows, loves and cares for us in an extravagant way. He is the One who will guard, protect and keep us - as He is good to His people. He knows about us and cares for us in the worst and fearful experiences of life. Even as we will one day go into our own dying experience, He cares for us, knows us and will protect us and give us His personal care and attention even in our own valley of the shadow of death - for He will be there with us and give us dying grace. We may fear He will not be, but He’s promised He will be there and He will bring us safely through Jordan’s waters no matter our fears and experiences in that dark valley. He is always this good God to His people.

He is so good to His creation, but the amazing thing is that some people ignore, neglect and even reject this God. They do not see His goodness and say words like “*If God allowed this to happen, then I have no time for Him, I will not believe on Him!*” People say that about this Covid-19 pandemic, yet if you asked them, they never acknowledged God existed because of the good they’d known before that time! Some of you listening have had God’s goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your lives, yet you do not have this God as your God; you have never trusted Him as your Saviour in the Lord Jesus. In Jonah’s time, the Assyrians were warned of His judgement –

as they faced an angry God – yet they repented and trusted God and were safe. I urge you to do the same. If you do not, you will face an angry God and who can endure His fierce anger especially on the day of judgement when we have to face Him on our own?

On that day, all those who have trusted in Him will say “*The Lord is good*” and will be safe and secure for ever in the stronghold and refuge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such ones would have known and tasted that the Lord is good - in their life, even in the painful, confusing and strange circumstances of their death, but on the day of judgement they will most clearly see His knowledge and care of them throughout all their lives and they will bless the hand that guided them all the way. For those listening who don't have this God as their God through the Lord Jesus Christ, I urge you to seek Him, find Him and have Him as your own Saviour, so that together we will go into what lies ahead, conscious, rejoicing and aware of the 3 things that God wants us to know personally from this verse.