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Nahum 1:1, 1927 - 1930

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Nahum 1, 1.

"From the book of the vision of

Nahum the Elkoshite,"

I want to call your attention tonight to
one of the minor prophets. Too little is known
concerning these men who are represented in our Bible
only by a number of short books. Very seldom do we
remember that their names are names of men who were
very much alive, who were powerful preachers and
whose methods and characters carry some important
lessons for us.

Such a one was Nahum. Is it not true that
to us the word Nahum is the title of a small
book of the Bible, containing only three chapters,
and seldom if ever read. And yet Nahum was an
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studying for a few moments. He was the man who
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Consider the situation when Nahum arose
as a prophet to Judah. For years Israel and Judah
had been paying tribute money to support the luxury
of pagan imperialism. The armies of Babylon and
Nineveh had swept back and forth in the scatters of
conquering and the desolation of defeat. Assyria and
Egypt had threatened each other across the Babylonian
stretch of intervening country and had threatened
to make of Gilead a bloody Belgium.

All around great cities were rising into
proud power and eating again into pitiable's ruin.
Babylon was growing, Nineveh was becoming more and
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Meanwhile, Jerusalem the city of Jehovah, beseeching
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I want to call your attention tonight to one of the minor prophets. Too little is known concerning these men who are represented in our Bible only by a number of short books. Very seldom do we remember that their names are names of men who were very much alive, who were powerful preachers and whose methods and characters carry some important lessons for us.

Such a one was Nahum. Is it not true that to us the word Nahum means only the title of a small book of the Bible, containing only three chapters, and seldom, if ever read? And yet Nahum was an amazing character in his day and one well worth studying for a few moments. He was the man "who laughed at foes."

Consider the situation when Nahum appeared as a prophet in Judah. For years Israel and Judah had been paying tribute money to satisfy the hunger of pagan imperialism. The armies of Babylon and Nineveh had swept back and forth in the ecstasy of conquering and the despair of defeat. Assyria and Egypt had threatened each other across the helpless stretch of intervening country and had threatened to make of Galilee a bloody Belgium.

All around great cities were rising into proud power and falling again into pitiable ruin. Babylon was growing, Nineveh was becoming more and more aggressive, Thebes was collecting a great army. Meanwhile, Jerusalem the city of Jehovah, bearing the promise of great glory, was a mere settlement.
without adequate defenses, exposed to the cruel whims of any king who was for the moment holding power. There was no joy left in her gates, no hero to hurl defiance against her foes—Jerusalem had become a toy with which boasting monarchs played for a moment between wars.

For a brief period there was a flash of promise on the horizon. Thebes rose in sudden might and Thebes was a new figure in the game of world-conquest. Israel and Judah had long since lost all hope for mercy from Assyria, from Egypt, from Babylon and from Nineveh. If they continued to wax great Jerusalem's doom was sealed. But Thebes might overthrow them and then be merciful to God's chosen people. And so all Israel looked hopefully toward Thebes and prayed for its success.

Then came the news of Thebes' collapse, in a vast cataclysm of destruction. The roar of her ruin destroyed all the lingering hopes in Israel. The dust of her defeat blinded the eyes of Judah and they saw no longer the sureness of God's promise. Now the deepest blackness of their night of woe had been reached. They were, of all people most miserable. They could sing no more, they could trust no more, they could pray no more. Their faith in God had turned to dust and ashes on their lips. Seemingly God had deserted them. There was no hope. Forever, Jerusalem was doomed to be a plaything of heathen nations. What could Jehovah do against the continued defiance and arrogance of the gods of the heathen, of Gog and Magog, of
Osiris, of Baal and the Bull-God of Nineveh? We can well imagine how men stood on the streets of Jerusalem with black despair written on their faces and bewailing the utter disappearance of all hope for a new and brighter day.

But what is that sudden noise which breaks in upon their sad conversations? It sounds like laughter. It is. A great outburst of laughter rings down the sad avenues of the city of God; it echoes out over the hills of Judah; it sounds like a trumpet call over the valleys of Israel. Someone is laughing — victoriously, triumphantly — while the people stand aghast. Is this man mad? Is this the insane glee of a maniac? Does he know the sadness of the situation? Does he realize what we are up against?

No he is not insane — this laughing preacher. He knows the situation — he knows the blackness of the circumstances — he knows the despair into which his people have fallen. But he laughs — calmly, victoriously, triumphantly sure of the invincible, indomitable power of God. He laughs — but under the roar of his laughter we can hear the words: "The Lord will avenge you. He will crush Nineveh and destroy Babylon. The Lord shall laugh at them; the Lord shall hold them in derision."

This is Nahum's contribution to the literature of prophecy. In the night of his people's despair, he lifted his voice to the silent skies and shouted in supreme triumph. "God cannot be beaten." All this seeming triumph on the part of his foes is but illusion. Nineveh is doomed. All who hate Jehovah will be beaten back — there is no
defeat for God. Opposition is folly. Armies and chariots are like chaff before the wind of His anger. The universe fights for God. God cannot be beaten.

And this is all we know about Nahum — this laughing, triumphant note of defiance in his three brief chapters. His name means "Consolation" or "Comfort" but seldom has there been a name more inappropriate. "Consolation. There is nothing to console about and no one who needs consolation. God is winning and only fools refuse to believe it." And he proceeds to write a brief book which for magnificent defiance stands unparalleled in the history of the Bible. He proposed no suggestion for Israel's reform; he had no forgiveness in his heart for those who opposed Jehovah; he made no comment on the social conditions of his time. Down through the centuries comes only his laughter and his brief book which can be summed up in one brief sentence — "God cannot be beaten".

Listen to history and you will see how his shout of magnificent defiance echoes and re-echoes in the corridors of time. Judas Maccabaeus, the great Liberator of God's chosen people, heard it when Syria has risen to imperial supremacy and is treading out the life of the world. He counts his life as nothing. He cuts loose from all encumbrances. He refuses to count his foes and his own forces. He is not interested in the pleas of his friends bidding him be sane and yield to the terrible threats of Syria's might. He knows only that God cannot be beaten. He laughs. The laughter spreads from home to home. The
Syrians hear it and admire the blazing courage, the burning faith of Israel. God cannot be beaten!

Our Savior Himself hears it. The shadow of the cross is upon Him. The foes are gathering outside. His little band of disciples are huddled together in fear of the approaching calamity. The darkness of hatred and sin is threatening to engulf all He said and did. His foes seem to be victorious. It is the hour of darkness. But Jesus calmly lifts His head and says: "I have overcome the world". God cannot be beaten.

The coliseum at Rome hears it. Wild beasts are howling in their cages. The crowd yells for blood. The signal is given. The gates are open. The lions leap forward. Silence grips the crowd. There in the center of the arena a little group of people are kneeling in prayer. They rise to their feet. Their faces show no fear. As the lions come nearer they begin to sing. And as the claws of cruel beasts tear their flesh and their limbs asunder these men and women laugh. God cannot be beaten!

Luther hears it as he stands before the diet of Worms. There are the kings and emperors and there are the bloodhounds of Rome thirsting for his blood. Before his mind's eye there appears the picture of John Huss burning at the stake. He remembers that before this princes have broken their promises. Yet there he stands and says finally: "Here I stand, etc. And through the words we seem to hear a defiant peal of laughter. God cannot be beaten.

Tyndale, the translator of the Bible, hears it, as the flames mount up to consume his broken
writing body. His enemies have destroyed his English New Testament; they have cursed him, starved him, exiled him. They have fought him with diabolical fury in the name of Jesus. And now they are burning him and in a few moments his old body will be a mass of charred embers. But he says confidently through the blaze: "O God, open the King of England's eyes." God cannot be beaten!

Pitkin, the great Chinese missionary, hears it, as the Boxer fiends climb over the walls of his compound and brandish their knives in glee. He uses his last moments to say a word to his servant: "Take word to my wife" he says. "Tell her to send our boy to some good school until he can become a preacher. And tell her, then, to send him back here to China where they killed me". Then he turned and laughed while the cruel knives hacked him into ribbons of flesh. God cannot be beaten!

Were they all mad, these men? Had Nahum started an epidemic of futile insanity? Ah, my friend, if they were mad then would to God we had more of that madness today. But they were not mad - theirs was merely a supreme, indomitable, triumphant faith in the conquering power of God. They did not carefully and cautiously weigh and measure their chances for victory; they never heard of the word "impossible", they never doubted the invincibility of God's cause. And so they became heroes in the Church of God - men whose names ring down through the centuries.
among those who have helped the Church march down through the ages - confident of her strength, sure of her destiny, gloriously aware of her final glorious consummation. They were the leaders - and the quality which made them leaders can be summarized in the one brief sentence: "God cannot be beaten."

Friend of mine, do we not need this magnificent defiance today? The enemies of Christ and his Church are all about us. Sometimes they seem to be victorious. We are so fearful, so solemn, so weak, so indifferent.

Laugh while our enemies quail. Laugh while we start forward. Echo the defiance of Nahum. Attain the supreme confidence of Jesus. God cannot be beaten.