

July 26, 2020

Majoring in the Minors
Nahum: Lost in New York
Nahum 1:7-11

Opening Words: Corrie ten Boon (1892-1983) was a Dutch Christian. She and her family helped many Jews escape the Nazi's concentration camps. In time, they were caught and sent to Ravens Bruck concentration camp. Those were dark days in her life. After the war, she wrote a book on those experiences, *The Hiding Place*. The popularity of that book brought her fame in Christian circles. One of her favorite topics was God's goodness. She said, it is easy to speak of God's goodness when life is good. It is not so easy when life is not so good. Like the day she saw her own sister starve to death at Ravens Bruck. She said during life's most difficult times we need to remember Psalm 103:11, "*For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him.*" She often concluded her speeches by saying, "There is an ocean of God's love available--there is plenty for everyone. May you never doubt that victorious love. May we never forget, God loves us!

This is sermon number seven in my thirteen-part sermon series, *Majoring in the Minors*. To date, we have looked at Joel, Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah. Next week, we look at Habakkuk. Today, we look at Nahum. Through an Old Testament eye it is a book of sin and punishment. Through a New Testament eye, it is a book about grace. Never forget, the Minor Prophets remind us of the great qualities of God. Our scripture reading for today is Nahum 1:7-11. Let me call this message *Lost in New York*.

Nahum 1:7-11 The LORD is good,
a refuge in times of trouble.
He cares for those who trust in him,
⁸ but with an overwhelming flood
he will make an end of Nineveh;
he will pursue his foes into the realm of darkness.
⁹ Whatever they plot against the LORD
he will bring to an end;
trouble will not come a second time.
¹⁰ They will be entangled among thorns
and drunk from their wine;
they will be consumed like dry stubble.
¹¹ From you, Nineveh, has one come forth
who plots evil against the LORD
and devises wicked plans.

Many years ago, before man walked on the moon, before a civil war threatened to divide America, or before Columbus discovered a New World, there was a man who

spoke for God. His name meant "Comforter," but we just call him Nahum. His exact location is unknown, but we do know he spoke to the people of Judah prior to the year 612 BC. The ones receiving these words were the people of Nineveh. Yes, it was the same Nineveh God sent Jonah to one hundred years earlier, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, known for her cruelty, idolatry, and wickedness. The Assyrian Empire covered parts of present-day Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. This time, they were guilty of backsliding. They had repented for Jonah, but they had returned to their old ways. God has had enough and now they must pay for their sinning. Those are not just empty words. History tells us the great city of Nineveh was destroyed by a devastating fire in the year 612 BC. Nahum's brief book, only three chapters long, reminds us sin must be taken seriously. It is as true today as it was in Nahum's time. This is the truth.

According to Webster, a sin is an immoral act against divine law. We should take sin seriously because our sins damage our relationship with God. While we are not known for our cruelty, idolatry, and wickedness, we are all guilty of sinning. It is no secret. We know we are sinners and God knows we are sinners. The Apostle Paul knew we were sinners. One of the great scriptures in the New Testament is Roman 3:23, "*All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.*" In seminary I took three classes in Greek. In one of those classes, I studied the Greek word for "all." The word for "all" in Biblical Greek means everyone. That means everyone is guilty of sinning. That means we are all sinners. That means we are more like the Ninevites than we care to admit.

James W. Moore (1938-2019) was the pastor of the 7,500 member St. Luke United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas from 1984-2006. He received his Master of Divinity degree from the Methodist Theological School in Delaware, Ohio. Through the years he wrote many books, which are nothing more than his printed sermons. I own several of those books. One of those books is entitled *Yes, Lord, I Have Sinned, But I Have Several Excellent Excuses*. In that book, he tells us our sins originate in four sources. Three of those ways are found in two parables in the fifteen chapter of Luke.

Sometimes, we sin by being led astray. That is found in the parable of the lost coin. In that parable a coin is lost. That coin equaled a day's wages. That means it is worth finding. The coin did not grow legs and walk away. The coin was lost because someone misplaced it. That is what happens with people. Some sin because of the influence another has on them. Parents know it is true. That is why we evaluate our children's friends. That is why we want our children to participate in wholesome activities. Parents fear their young will be influenced by others and get into trouble. God fears we will be led astray by others too. Can I ask you a question? Who are the most influential people in your life? Sometimes we sin by being led astray.

Sometimes, we sin by running away. That was the story of the prodigal son. He could not wait for his father to die, so he went to his father for his share of the inheritance. He took his cash and ran. For a short time, he lived life in the fast lane. I

will let your imagination fill in the blanks. Then, he discovered what everyone knows. Life is expensive. In a short time, he is struggling to survive. Then, as the Bible says, he came to his senses and returns to his father asking for a job. You can call it selfishness. Those are the sins we commit when we think the world revolves around us. Those are the sins we commit because we think we are God's gift to the world. Can I ask you a question? Do the people in your life consider you selfish? Sometimes, we sin by running away because we are selfish.

Sometimes, we sin because of resentment. The parable of the prodigal son reveals two origins of sin. The first is selfishness. The second is resentment. It is found in the older son who stayed home. While his little brother was out there living the wild life, he stayed at home. He got up early daily and went to work. You can call him responsible, but he felt foolish. He dreamed of the wild things he was missing. At first, he must have admired his brother, but in the end, he resented his little brother. It is no fun working when others are having fun. Many believe this is the greatest sin in the life of the church today. It is no fun doing church work, when so many have forgotten the church. Can I ask you a question? Who do you resent? Sometimes, we sin because of resentment.

Sometimes we sin by wandering off. That was the story of the Ninevites. One hundred years earlier, God's reluctant prophet, Jonah, arrived and told them they must repent. The people heard his word and responded. They started acting like God wanted them to act. They became more loving. They became less judgmental. They became more accepting. They promised they would never return to their cruel, idolatrous, and wicked ways. However, as the emotion wore off, they began to backside. Before long they were known once again for their cruelty, idolatry, and wicked. The Ninevites are not much different from us. We know what God wants us to do but we refuse to do it. Can I ask you these questions? How far have you wandered away from God? Are you the person God intended at the very beginning? The excitement of that mountaintop experience began to fade away and found yourself falling into your old routine. Sometimes, we sin because we wander off. I hope that is not your story. Nahum reminds us there is a price to pay for sinning. However, this is the good news for today.

Nahum lived in Old Testament times and we live in New Testament times. The great city of Nineveh was destroyed by a fire in the year 612 BC. That was their punishment for sinning. They got what they deserved. That was the Old Testament way. We deserve to be punished for our sins, but it will never happen, because we are New Testament times. Every Sunday school child knows Jesus died on the cross for our sins. His death was not pretty because our sins are not pretty. Yet, his death handled the sin problem. How you respond to Jesus's death is extremely important. Is it just a passing thought or is it a life changing experience? It has been said, *"God's grace is not an excuse to sin, but rather a reason to love and serve him more fully."* If you are thankful Jesus died for your sins say, **"Amen!"**

The address was 202 Midwood Street. That was my grandparent's address in Brooklyn, New York, and the address of the home that my mother was raised. We visited it annually. As a child, I remember it as a massive place. It included an outer sitting room with a player piano, an inner living room with a modest television set, dining room and a tiny kitchen. Upstairs, there were three bedrooms and a full bath with a skylight. It seemed massive to me as a child. Recently, I researched that massive home. It was constructed in 1901 and is 1,800 square feet. The market value of that 1,800 square foot home in Brooklyn today is \$1.8 million. It is hard to compare property value in Brooklyn, New York with Youngstown, Ohio. Externally, the house was not original. My mother called it a "Brown Stone." The entire neighborhood was filled with them. Each one was identical. Each one was constructed from a tan stone, a flat roof, a bay window, and a flight of stairs leading up to the front door. The only thing that changed about each dwelling was the address. My grandparents lived at 202 Midwood Street. I will never forget that address because of an event that happened to me one day on one of my family's visits to Brooklyn.

I was not very old. I must have been six or seven. My grandparents wanted to entertain me, so they borrowed a bicycle from a neighbor for me to ride during the visit. The problem was there are very few places a child can ride a bicycle in the middle of Brooklyn. My only option was to ride up and down Midwood Street. I am confident my parents told me to be careful and I am confident they told me my grandparent's address, 202 Midwood Street, because all the houses looked the same. The problem was I did not listen to them. I was more interested in trying out the bicycle. When I jumped on the bike and began to peddle. In a few seconds, I was lost in the adventure of the ride. I picked up speed fast and I imagined being in all kinds of exciting places. I was having a great time! When I snapped back to reality, I discovered the truth. I was lost in New York. All the homes were identical, and I did not know which one belonged to my grandparents. I could not remember my grandparent's address, 202 Midwood Street. Emotionally, I went from the highest mountain to the lowest valley. Fear began flood through me. I thought I would never see my family again. How would I survive in the streets of New York alone? There was only one option, I began to cry. I know that is hard to believe because I am so manly today. I promised myself, I would never ride a bicycle again and I prayed that God we help me.

God heard my prayer. My savior came to recue me. In that emotional moment I heard comforting words. It was my mother, who had been watching me from the window the whole time. I do not remember her exact words, but I do remember the relief I felt. My mother took me by the hand, wiped my tears, and led me home. I took one last look at that horrible bicycle and walked inside. I was safe and sound. I am confident I was extra good the rest of that trip. Can I ask you another question? When was the last time you were lost?

It is not just a story about a small boy lost in a big city. It is the story of the Christian faith, itself. We are lost in sin. Everyone does it and it comes in many forms, each one

damaging our relationship with God. We deserve what the people of Nineveh got, punishment. But our punishment never comes because our savior came 2,000 years ago. His name is Jesus. Grace is a wonderful thing. How do you respond to God's grace? It has been said, *"God's grace is not an excuse to sin, but rather a reason to love and serve him more fully."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**