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A Gospel Moment, Part 2

Nahum 1:15, "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."

As you think of redemptive history, consider the following *Gospel Moments*:

- When Abraham was 70 years old, God entered into his idolatrous life and redeemed him! What a glorious moment in this man's life; the promise of salvation and the promise of an heir. Yet the celebration was short-lived. For Abraham's call led to a forsaking of civilization as he knew it to live as an alien and stranger in a foreign land. As

for the child of promise; what child? For the next thirty years Abraham would follow the Lord with many Divine promises unfilled of which the child was but one of them!

- Then when Abraham was about 100, God gave him and his wife a child, Isaac- another *Gospel Moment!* Yet the celebration quickly ended. Isaac's half-brother, Ishmael, began picking on him. This led to grave conflicts between Sarah and Ishmael's mother. Abraham couldn't handle it and so abdicated his role as covenant head, leaving Hagar and Ishmael to Sarah's sinful proclivities. Then when the child of promise was 12, God called Abraham to offer him as a sacrifice of dedication!
- Jacob enjoyed a *Gospel Moment* in Bethel when God revealed himself to the fleeing deceiver. This led to many years of servitude and suffering in Haran. Then God redeemed him in a wrestling match which lasted all night. The next morning Jacob was threatened by Esau such that the patriarch feared for his life.
- Moses enjoyed a *Gospel Moment* when he gave up the riches of Egypt to suffer with the people of God. This resulted in a 40 year sojourn in the desert!

Now, one could go on and on. Throughout redemptive history we read of moments when God works on behalf of His people unto their salvation or preservation (that is what is meant by a *Gospel Moment*). This usually then is followed by the realities of life in this world with its sin and miseries!

As we look at the book of Nahum, we are examining one such moment in redemptive history. Again, the time is 650 B.C. Assyria is at its peak in terms of its power and the king of Judah, Manasseh, has just been converted. At this time, the Lord raised up a prophet named Nahum (~"comfort") to comfort God's people with a message revolving around God's disciplining of both His and His people's foe: the Assyrians! How long was this message enjoyed? Not very long! For the 7th and 6th centuries were for God's people! Yet for a moment, in 650 BC, God's people received from Nahum a glorious proclamation of liberation from one of their most hated enemies!

From this proclamation we have learned three things when it comes to *A Gospel Moment*:

1. It is the realization of a big plan- one which began before time!
2. It involves an unthinkable promise of deliverance- here that the Assyrians would soon be destroyed!
3. It calls for a celebration governed by God's word!

...this morning, let's consider three more characteristics of *A Gospel Moment*...

Based on a Glorious Cause

Nahum 1:15, "Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace! Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one pass through you; he is cut off completely."

At one and the same time, this is a glorious promise and yet a most confusing promise. For as is the pattern of gospel moments. On the one hand we know that Nahum preached this message in/around 650 BC at the height of Assyrian domination over Palestine, and yet in 38 short years, this world power called Assyria would be wiped off the face of the earth- totally devastated/“completely cut off”! No doubt this is what Nahum had in mind when he called God’s people in this text to “celebration.” On the other hand we know that God’s people would not enjoy much of a respite from foreign oppression; for the nation which would destroy Assyria was, at the writing of this prophecy, on the rise, the Babylonians! In fact, in just a few short years, God’s people would feel heat both from the Babylonians and the Egyptians (recall Josiah was killed in 609 BC when he tried to stop the Egyptians from going through the land of Judah on their way to aid the Assyrians who were being attacked by the Babylonians!).

So while God’s people might have cause for rejoicing in Nahum’s day because the Assyrians were about to be defeated, nevertheless the threat of oppression, violence, and destruction would continue to cast a dark shadow over Judah! This means whatever “celebration” and “rejoicing” in which God’s people might engage would be very, very short-lived! So much for that *gospel moment!* Yet there is much more to this passage than meets the eye!

Nahum 1:11, “From you has gone forth one who plotted evil against the Lord, a wicked counselor.”

Evidently during this era there was an advisor of the Assyrian King- possibly the King Himself- who had it out for God’s people. Accordingly every chance he got, he’d counsel evil against the Lord; which means he went out of his way to encourage the king to harm God’s people. Who was this “wicked counselor”? The word for “wicked” is another name for Satan (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:2). Accordingly, “wicked counselor” could be translated loosely as “a satanic counselor.” Evidently, Satan possessed a high ranking official or the King of Assyria himself, and plotted the wicked schemes imaginable against God and His people! The word in our text referencing “the wicked one” is one and the same as in Nahum 1:11. Accordingly, we take this passage as far more than simply a promise regarding the downfall of Assyria (for again, how much rejoicing could there be knowing that as soon as Assyria fell, another evil nation would rise up and finish the job, cf. Habakkuk 1)! Rather, we understand that Nahum here is speaking ultimately of the downfall of Satan, a downfall which began with the First Advent of Christ AND which would be consummated at the Second Advent of Christ! So truly this is a most glorious moment!

Luke speaking of Satan at the temptation of Christ recorded this:

Luke 4:5-7, “And he led [Christ] up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, ‘I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.’”

When man fell in the Garden, the Kingdoms of the world were given to Satan to rule as he

liked! This rule resulted in the slavery of man to the whims and will of the devil! Paul speaking of Christ describes the second Adam:

Colossians 2:15, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him."

At Christ's First Advent, the Lord stripped Satan of his power! The imagery here is that of a Roman Triumph where the conquered general would be paraded through the streets of Rome in chains being led by the victorious general! How and when did Christ do this?

Hebrews 2:14-15, "Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

In Christ's First Advent, the Lord crushed the power that Satan had over death! Accordingly, if Christ is your savior, you need not fear death! But notice what is going to happen at the Second Coming; specifically referencing the hold Satan currently has over the Kingdoms of this world:

Revelation 11:15, "And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.'"

When Christ returns, the reign and rule of Satan will be overturned completely! And not only this, he, his servants (the demons), and his followers (all those outside of Christ) will be cast into the lake of fire (cf. Revelation 20:10, 15)! Family of God, I don't know about you, but this is the basis for great celebration this day and every day! Truly, "...greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4)!

Do you see the glorious promise that Nahum gave in our text this morning! On the one hand, the wicked nation of Assyria which existed to harm God and His people would be destroyed! Yet get this, the one behind the wicked passions of Assyria (*Belial*) would someday as well be "completely cut off!"

Today we live in what has been known as the already/not yet! We have witnessed the destruction of Satan's power to deceive the nations and so to hold us under fear of death. Yet today we still live in a fallen world where Satan remains the "prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2)! But soon, very soon, we shall witness the total and complete destruction of this foe! Talk about a gospel moment, hallelujah! And yet, there is more.

Secured by a Sovereign Lord

Both this and the next point will be derived from a comparison of the original announcement of this passage given in Isaiah 52:7 and our text. There is a huge difference between the original

passage as given in Isaiah and this one in Nahum.

Isaiah 52:7, “How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, *and* says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”

Nahum 1:15, “Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace! Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one pass through you; he is cut off completely.”

Isaiah 52:7 ends with, “...*and* says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” Whereas Nahum 1:15 obviously and purposely dropped this! Why do you suppose Nahum dropped the last line?

Nahum didn’t. The whole of the first chapter of this prophecy, is a dissertation on the Sovereignty of God over the Nations! Prior to Nahum 1:15 and Nahum’s quoting of Isaiah 52:7, Nahum made the following eleven points: God’s Sovereign Rule:

1. Is Righteous, Nahum 1:2.
2. Is Patient, Nahum 1:3a.
3. Is Just, Nahum 1:3b.
4. Is Unpredictable and Foreboding, Nahum 1:3c.
5. Is Unthwartable, Nahum 1:4-6.
6. Is Good, Nahum 1:7.
7. Can Seem Brutal, Nahum 1:8; 3:1-7.
8. Confounds the Plans of Man, Nahum 1:9.
9. Will Bring About the Destruction of Wicked Men and Nations, Nahum 1:10, 14.
10. Is Unthwartable, Nahum 1:11-12a.
11. Always Will Bring About Good for His People, Nahum 1:12b-13.

It was only AFTER Nahum made these points that he encouraged God’s people, “Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news [specifically that] ...never again will the wicked one pass through you; he is cut off completely.”

It would be quite redundant and anti-climactic to go back to the point Nahum established at the start of this chapter. Yes, “our God reigns!” but that is NOT what Nahum wanted us to walk away with here. What he wanted us to walk away with is the glorious promise which was given in the context of God’s unthwartable, sovereign will, God has deigned good for the people of God! And so Christian knowing the sovereign rule of Christ, “Celebrate a feast and pay your vows!” When:

- The fig tree doesn’t blossom!
- There is no fruit on the vine!
- The olive harvest should fail.
- Famine and hardship has overcome you!

- The flocks fail and the cattle die out!

Exalt in the Lord! Rejoice in the God of your salvation! For in and through all things our sovereign Lord is bringing about His glorious purpose and work! That brings us to the last point which once again is derived from comparing our text with its original.

It Can and Should Characterize our Lives

Isaiah 52:7, “How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, *and* says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”-

Recall the intended recipient of this passage was NOT written to a people struggling beneath the oppressive rule of the Assyrians but to God’s people who had been taken into exile at the hands of the Babylonian Kingdom! Recall what we learned in our study of Isaiah:

- The book of Isaiah was written toward the end of Isaiah’s tenure as a prophet in which he brought a message of the Lord to three distinct peoples.
- His own generation living toward the end of the golden age of Judah (after Uzziah died)- this was and is Isaiah 1-39!
- The people of God living in the days of the Babylonians a good 120 years later who would be conquered by this nation and brought into exile- this was and is Isaiah 40-55!
- Finally, the people of God who would return to the ruined and charred remains of Jerusalem in 539 B.C. and beyond- this was and is Isaiah 56-66!

Accordingly, Isaiah 52:7 was originally given in reference NOT to the Assyrians, BUT the Babylonians! That means that the glorious promise of Isaiah 52:7 was meant to be read in light of the Babylonian exile! But then we read the promise of our text given NOT to a people in exile, BUT ones suffering under a completely different foe, the Assyrians.

Nahum 1:15, “Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace! Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one pass through you; he is cut off completely.”

This passage, clearly a restating of Isaiah 52, was given to the people of God in 650 B.C. Nahum took a promise which God intended for another people and applied to his generation! Is he allowed to do that? Are we allowed to do that? No and yes!

Because Nahum is writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, he is allowed to do that for clearly he knew what ultimately was in the mind of the One who gave the original promise in Isaiah 52! That means that unless the Bible explicitly says, we are NOT allowed to take promises which God intended for a specific people and apply them to ourselves. Only an inspired writer can do that!

However, because Nahum, writing as a prophet, applied the promise of Isaiah 52 to his own generation, it certainly opens the door to the possibility that this gospel moment was intended for a much wider audience than the one to whom it was originally given! And that brings us to another inspired writer, Paul. Paul, writing a good 700 years after Isaiah originally gave the promise, referenced Isaiah 52:7 in light of the call of God in the gospel.

Romans 10:15, “And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!’”

From this we conclude that while God originally gave Isaiah 52:7 to the people of God living in the Babylonian Exile, nevertheless the Lord intended this to be a promise for all God’s people at all time! What was the promise? It was the glorious message that:

- In spite of the circumstances and situations in which you currently live, God reigns!
- And in His regency, He has brought about redemption in Christ such that in and through all things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us!

This means, brothers and sisters, that the gospel moment which God’s people enjoyed when Isaiah or Nahum gave this promise is intended NO LONGER to be a “moment” BUT a “life-time” and so that which ought to characterize our thinking all the days of our lives! O. Palmer Robertson, referencing William Henry Green who served many years as a professor at Princeton when the school was solid, wrote this:

Green notes the connection of Nahum 2:1 (Eng. 1:15) with Isa. 52:7, where deliverance from the Babylonian captivity is more immediately connected with God’s work of redemption for Israel. He calls attention to the distinctive methodology of the writers of Scripture, ‘by which terms and expressions primarily descriptive of the fall of one hostile power are applied interchangeably to that of others.’ He concludes that Nahum applies Isaiah’s precise words about deliverance from Babylon to Assyria’s defeat as a way of ‘calling attention to the connection which really subsists between the two events, as in essence really one.’ Green notes that Paul repeats this same language in Romans 10:17, and so intimates ‘an innate oneness between the message which announced the fall of those great persecuting powers, and the erection of that Kingdom which was finally to supplant them.’ (Robertson, 1990 , p. 84)

Accordingly, Robertson wrote this:

Because of the broader redemptive-historical structures of Scripture, this deliverance from Assyria’s oppression may be perceived as a microcosmic depiction of deliverance from all the oppression that comes as a consequence of sin, Satan, and death. (Robertson, 1990 , p. 83)

What practically does this mean for us today? Consider how the message of Isaiah 52

transformed the identity of Paul.

Romans 1:1-2, “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures [this would have included Isaiah and Nahum].”

I love this passage! When Paul thought of himself three things came to mind:

- He was a bond-servant- which was the lowest form of servant who had no rights, but simply served at the will and whim of his master. That’s our calling, is it not?!
- He viewed himself as one selected by God to be an apostle- a sent one into the Lord’s Kingdom. This we are not, though as members of Christ’s church, we have received a commissioning to “make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:18-20)
- Lastly, he understood that because of the grace of God in Christ he had become a gospel man- that is what is meant by “...set apart for the gospel.” IOW, the message of Isaiah 52:7 wasn’t that in which Paul lived for a moment! It was that which altered his life and so dictated:
 - Where He Went, Acts 16:6-8.
 - What He Ate, 1 Corinthians 8:13.
 - His Relationships within the church, Galatians 2:14.
 - His Freedom as a Roman citizen, Acts 16:28, 37.
 - What he Rejoiced Over, Philippians 1:18.
 - EVERYTHING...

1 Corinthians 9:19-23, “For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

Nothing less ought to characterize our lives! The *Gospel Moment* which God’s people enjoyed...

- In Nahum’s day when the Assyrian’s began their decline (Nahum 1:15)!
- During the exile when the Babylonians had proven victorious, but God people knew better (Isaiah 52:7)! This was no longer a moment, but that which overtook and so controlled all that Paul thought and did! Because of the cross, Paul had become a Gospel Man!

And brothers and sisters, whether you realize it or not, this is what we too have become in Christ! The gospel is intended by God to be much more than a message that you think about or

share from time to time! Rather, it is that which vanquishes the fallen mind (cf. 1 John 5:20) and so must control what we think, say, desire, and do! If you are not laboring to submit the entirety of your life to this message/worldview, you're missing your God-given calling!

And if you are one this day who sins have yet to be forgiven in Christ, you need this God given calling!

Bibliography

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About the Preacher

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