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Sermon: May 1, 2016  
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“REAPING, SOWING”**  
Nahum 1:1-15

- **“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. People reap what they sow”** (Galatians 6:7).
  - ? Is this true?
  - ? Are the consequences of good deeds *invariably* good? Are the effects of evil deeds *inevitably* bad?
  - ? If it wasn't written in Scripture, if logic and experience were all you had to go on, would you say **“People reap [exactly] what they sow”**?
  - {Job 1:8-19} Consider Job. YHWH praises him, saying: **“There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”** Then he allows Satan to rob Job of his fortune, slay most of his servants, and murder all ten of his sons and daughters.
    - {Job 2:3-7} Again YHWH praises Job for his blamelessness. Next thing you know God allows Satan to **“afflict Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.”**
    - Granted, the Almighty restores Job in the end. His body is healed, his wealth is multiplied, and he is blessed with one replacement for each child who was killed, seven new sons and three new daughters in all.
    - ? But does that math work? Has Job harvested what he planted?
    - Consider the psalmist's lament:

[The wicked] **have no struggles;**  
**their bodies are healthy and strong.**  
**They are free from common human burdens;**  
**they are not plagued by human ills.**

**Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure...**  
**All day long I have been afflicted,**  
**and every morning brings new**  
**punishment.** {Ps 73:4-5, 13-14}

- {Eccl 9:2-3a} Consider the Teacher's complaint:  
**All share a common destiny – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifice and those who do not.**

**As it is with the good,**  
**so with the sinful...**

**The same destiny overtakes all ....**

- ? Are the consequences of good deeds invariably good? Are the effects of evil deeds inevitably bad?
  - Please turn with me to Nahum 1:1: **“A prophecy concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.”**

As for the time, it is sometime between 663-612 B.C. It can't be earlier because chapter 3 refers to the destruction of Thebes, which occurred in 663. It can't be later because Nineveh will be destroyed in 612.

King Ashurbanipal rules the largest empire the world as yet seen. It is comprised of Egypt, Cyprus,

and much of Turkey in the west, southern Russia in the north, half of Iran in the east, a quarter of Saudi Arabia in the south, and all points in between, except Judah.

As for the place, Nahum is from Elkosh. Most scholars identify it with modern Alqosh, 30 miles north of Nineveh. Some say it is Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

These communities are far apart, but they have one thing in common. Each is situated well inside the boundaries of the Assyrian Empire.

These details are significant.

Given the time, we know that Assyria is in its heyday. Its armies appear to be invincible, its capital city impregnable, its power incontestable.

Given the place, we know that Nahum's family originated from the northern Hebrew kingdom of Israel (also called Samaria). In all likelihood they are members of the tribe of Naphtali.

Given the place, we know that Nahum's grandparents (or maybe his parents) survived the war of 720 B.C., when Sargon II pulverized Samaria. If Elkosh is Alqosh, they were leading citizens and thus they were deported. If it is Capernaum they were nobodies who were left to eke out a living in the ruins.

Given the place, we know that Nahum and his people are captives. If Elkosh is Alqosh they are strangers in a strange land. If Capernaum, they are on their native soil, but surrounded by foreign pagans whom the Assyrians forcibly resettled in Samaria.

And given the time we know that Judah, the southern Hebrew kingdom, is completely surrounded. Philistia on the Mediterranean coast, Egypt to the west and the south, Edom to the southeast, Moab to the east, Ammon to the northeast, and Israel to the north, all have been absorbed into the Assyrian Empire.

■ **“A prophecy concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.”**

Keep in mind that Nahum's audience consists of three groups: Assyrians, Judahites and Samaritans.

★ First, the Assyrians. The bulk of this **“prophecy concerning Nineveh”** is aimed squarely at them.

■ **1:11: “From you... has one come forth who plots evil against the LORD and devises wicked plans.”**

■ **1:14: “The LORD has given a command concerning you, Nineveh...”**

And so forth. God frequently speaks *to* the Assyrians, and often about them.

☆ Second, Judahites of the southern kingdom. One statement is addressed directly to them.

■ **1:15: “Celebrate your festivals, Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed.”**

■ Another is explicitly about them. 2:2: **“The LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob...”**

✧ Third, the Samaritans. Nothing is said about them or to them. The northern kingdom is dead and it will not rise again. Nevertheless, surviving Samaritans are listening in.

‡ Back to our question: Do **“People reap what they sow”**?

- Hear the word of the LORD in Nahum 1:2:

**The LORD is a jealous and avenging God;  
the LORD takes vengeance and is filled  
with wrath.**

**The LORD takes vengeance on his foes  
and vents his wrath against his enemies.**

- From verses 8 and 9:

<sup>8c</sup> **he will pursue his foes into darkness.**

<sup>9</sup> **Whatever they plot against the LORD  
he will bring to an end.**

- And verse 3b: **“The LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.”**

- Hence, YHWH empowered Assyria to destroy Samaria **“because [they] had sinned against the LORD their God”** (Second Kings 17:7).

- Hence, 1:12, YHWH has **“afflicted... Judah”** for her sin by allowing Assyria to exact much tribute and to conquer 46 of her cities, though not Jerusalem.

Hence, YHWH will utilize Babylon to obliterate Nineveh and end the Assyrian empire in 612 B.C.

✎ Do we **“reap what [we] sow”**? Yes! Holy God “takes vengeance” on defiant perpetrators of immorality, injustice, and idolatry by “[venting] **his wrath**” in acts of judgment.

But that is not the whole story!

The Assyrians intend to annihilate Judah. They have the wherewithal and the will power to do it.

If Nahum is prophesying early in the years between 663-612, Manasseh is king. He is the wickedest Hebrew monarch ever, and the majority of Judahites are following his lead.

If Nahum is prophesying later Josiah is king. He is the best Hebrew monarch ever and he leads his people in spiritual revival. Alas, it is too little, too late!

{II Ki 23:27} Though Judah has not quite matched the extreme depravity of Samaria prior to its destruction, it is not far behind. The LORD warns: **“I will remove Judah also from my presence as I removed Israel.”**

- Yet, despite Judah’s great guilt, in Nahum 1:12-13 YHWH also promises:

<sup>12</sup> .... **Although I have afflicted you, Judah,  
I will afflict you no more.**

<sup>13</sup> **Now I will break their yoke from your neck  
and tear your shackles away.”**

Of course, he keeps his word. Jerusalem will fall to Babylon in 587 B.C. – but Nineveh will be ground to dust twenty-five years before that, in 612.

- Why? 1:3: **“The LORD is slow to anger...”**

- And 1:7: **“The LORD is good,  
a refuge in times of trouble.”**

✎ {Jon 4:2} Do we **“reap what [we] sow”**? No! We do not always **“reap what [we] sow.”** As that other,

more famous prophet to Nineveh said, ours is **“a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”**

To review, **“The LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.” “People reap what they sow.”**

And, **“The LORD is slow to anger,” “a God who relents from sending calamity.” “People”** do not always **“reap what they sow.”**

How do we hold this both/and together?

☆ First, we thank and praise God for his undeserved grace, and rely entirely on it.

{Ro 6:23; Is 64:6} As much as we might want him to punish our enemies, we ourselves are in desperate need of his mercy and kindness. If **“the wages of [their] sin is death,”** so is ours. Apart from his work in us, **“all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”**

☆ Second, we seek a right understanding of God’s wrath.

The wrath of YHWH is qualitatively different from ours. Over the next few weeks we will explore in greater depth what God’s wrath is, and is not.

In a nutshell it is not a character attribute or a permanent disposition. It is never the LORD’s first option; rather, it is always his last resort.

God’s wrath is temporary anger, generated by perfect love, in reaction against injustice. It is exercised exclusively in acts of judgment on the unjust.

God never “flies of the handle,” never “lashes out”, never “loses his temper,” never exercises his wrath in

unrighteous ways. His judgments are informed, wise, deliberate, and proportional.

God does not misuse his wrath. He never executes judgment cruelly, callously, or casually, but always compassionately. His intent is to protect the weak, create the possibility of peace and, if possible, save the wicked.

☆ Third, we continually seek God, that we ourselves might not become objects of his wrath.

We keep drawing near to the LORD. Intimacy with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit opens us up to receive and to share the grace of God.

We keep drawing near to the LORD. Only by knowing God can we rightly understand his wrath.

We keep drawing near to the LORD. Pressing into Jesus empowers us to love God wholeheartedly and our neighbors as ourselves.

We keep drawing near to the LORD. Close relationship with Jesus equips us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

? Do **“People reap what they sow”**?

Yes, we do. Except, thank God, when by his grace we do not!

Nahum 1:1-15 is the word of the Lord.