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Beverly E.C.C. Chicago, IL

“A QUESTION (OR TWO) OF HEALTH” ~ Nahum 3:1-19

☑ Three years ago in the summer of 2013 I began to lose weight.

I felt glad. I was overweight, and I did not like the way my body looked and felt.

I was also a little worried, because I lost 40 pounds in a month and a half, without trying. On the other hand, I didn't exactly *feel* sick, just more tired than usual. I recall thinking there probably wasn't anything wrong.

On Monday, August 19 I saw my doctor. To my astonishment, she diagnosed me with Type II Diabetes and admitted me to Loyola University Medical Center.

The idea that I might be diabetic had never crossed my mind. I was ill, and I did not even know it.

? Do we recognize if and when we are sick or injured?

■ Please turn with me to Nahum 3:1:

**Woe to the city of blood,  
full of lies,  
full of plunder,  
never without victims!**

The Assyrians take pride in their dominance. They have subjugated 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 a shrunken Judah. Theirs is the largest empire the world as yet seen.

The Assyrians take pride in their wealth. Nineveh's royal treasuries are stuffed with gold, silver, precious jewels, and other plunder. The city's merchants are super rich, thanks to Assyrian monopolies on trade.

The Assyrians take pride in their status. Nations tremble at their name, foreign kings grovel before the emperor, and enemy soldiers beg for mercy. Everyone “knows” Assyria's armies are invincible, “knows” its capital is impregnable, “knows” its power is incontestable.

Assyria is in its imperial prime. By most military, economic, and political measures it is the picture of health.

Nevertheless, their vigor is skin deep. Though the empire seems to be robust, it is ill. Though it looks hale and hearty, it is ailing.

The Assyrians are blind to their injuries. They do not perceive that their headlong pursuit of power, prosperity, and prestige is hurting them.

■ In verse 1 the LORD God begins to deliver his diagnosis. He says Nineveh is “**the city of blood, full of lies**” (that is, lies about God in the form of idolatry), “**full of plunder, never without victims!**”

As for “**blood**,” violence – whether it is actually inflicted or merely threatened – is essential for building and keeping any worldly empire. How else does one nation subdue another?

As for “**lies**,” the Assyrians do not believe their idolatry is false. Why would they? To all appearances their supreme deity Aššur has blessed Assyria.

As for “**plunder**,” the Ninevites contend that they have won it fair and square. ‘To the victor belong the spoils,’ and all that. Isn’t that how the world works?

As for “**victims**,” they are more candid than most about their cruelty. Then again, it is a dog-eat-dog world, and they conduct themselves accordingly.

- God Almighty continues his diagnosis in verse 16:

**You have increased the number of your  
merchants  
till they are more [numerous] than the  
stars in the sky,  
but like locusts they strip the land  
and then fly away.**

When the Assyrians seize a city they loot it, but pillaging is not a reliable source of steady income. To keep the money rolling in on schedule they extract taxes from their new territories, and they also send in merchants to expand and maintain their exclusive commercial network.

In this there is no give and take, no reciprocity. It is entirely to Nineveh’s benefit.

But the Assyrians do not lose sleep wondering if economic exploitation is justified. In their eyes wealth equals pleasure, equals opportunity, equals security. Not to mention that it looks like proof positive that the gods favor them.

“We are powerful, we are rich, and we are preeminent. We are a superpower – *the* superpower.”

“We are in peak form, at the top of our game. No one has a mightier army or bigger bank account or greater impact than us. We are strong and vigorous!”

Nineveh trumpets its vitality in grand architecture, striking sculptures, monumental pillars, and cuneiform tablets kept in vast libraries. And it is all built on violence, falsehood, thievery, and victimization.

But what the Ninevites think of as solutions to problems, Holy God calls sins. What they see as signs of strength, All-Knowing God diagnoses as symptoms of disease. Hence he begins by saying: “**Woe to [you]...!**”

It is easy to condemn the Assyrians. We would never perpetrate the horrific atrocities they did, right?

Probably not. Still, no one is completely immune to the contagion of immorality, injustice, and idolatry, even if we are generally subtler about it than the ancients were.

? When we are sick or injured do we recognize it, or are we unaware? Might we even mistake our sins for solutions, and our disease symptoms for strength?

✎ O God, use your word to penetrate our hearts, judging our thoughts and attitudes, laying bare the depths of our spirits! May your Holy Spirit open our eyes to see if there is sickness or injury in our souls!

☑ Back to Loyola in August 2013. My hospital roommate knew he was sick. He had extensive leg ulcers that were not healing, and that was the only thing he would talk about.

Yet he refused to talk about what was causing them. The guy weighed 450 pounds, subsisted on junk food, and had a sedentary lifestyle.

Every time the nurse offered to call the nutritionist, he politely – but firmly – declined.

Every time his dad suggested that he needed to change his diet and start exercising, he exploded.

He insisted that his sores take top priority. He could not eat differently until they were completely healed. He could not get moving until they were gone. He spoke as if the leg ulcers were a terrible danger and the morbid obesity was just a minor nuisance.

? Do we recognize the true nature and full extent of our sickness or injury?

● In Nahum 2:5 “**Nineveh summons her picked troops.**” When their enemies attack in 612 B.C. the Assyrians will call in the army. But like the Keystone Cops even their elite forces will “**stumble on their way,**” human dominoes tumbling down in sequence.

■ The consequences will be grim. 3:2-3:

<sup>2</sup> **The crack of whips,  
the clatter of wheels,  
galloping horses  
and jolting chariots!**  
<sup>3</sup> **Charging cavalry,  
flashing swords  
and glittering spears!**  
**Many casualties,  
piles of dead,**

**bodies without number,  
people stumbling over corpses –**

The Assyrians have seen this before – but till now the stacked corpses have been their victims. Not this time!

■ They will rely on tried and true tactics to shore up Nineveh’s fortifications, but to no avail. Verses 14-15:

**Draw water for the siege,  
strengthen your defenses!**

**Work the clay,  
tread the mortar,  
repair the brickwork!**

**There the fire will consume you;  
the sword will cut you down –  
and it will devour you...**

■ The tallest walls, widest moat, hugest stockpile of weapons, best strategizing, and most troops will not be enough. There are no military solutions for, 3:5, “**I am against you,’ declares the LORD Almighty.**”

This phrase also appeared in 2:13 and we dug into this last week. In brief, there are occasions when our immorality, injustice, and idolatry cross the line and YHWH intervenes against humankind for the sake of humankind.

The Assyrians have crossed that line.

■ So in verse 19 the LORD issues the fateful prognosis:

**Nothing can heal you;  
your wound is fatal....**

Nahum is prophesying years before the city will fall in 612 B.C. The empire is in its imperial heyday. To worldly eyes it is the most robust nation on earth.

But in fact it is deathly ill, mortally injured. Nineveh is so far gone there is no hope of healing. The Assyrians are as the Walking Dead.

? {Jnh 4:2} How can this be? Isn't God **"gracious... compassionate ... slow to anger... abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity"**?

{Ps 103:3} Isn't God the Divine Physician **"Who forgives all [our] sins and heals all [our] diseases"**?

{Joel 2:32} Hasn't God promised that, **"Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved"**?

The key to understanding is the last phrase, **"...who calls on the name."**

God's grace and mercy are infinite, his ability to heal is unlimited, his power to save is boundless. Yet he does not force us to call on him, does not make us accept his gifts, does not force us to receive him.

For God's power to be activated in us we must recognize the nature and extent of our illness and injury. It is necessary that we voluntarily turn to him and cry out in need and trust, help me! Rescue me! Save me!

Please hear me: this message is not relevant just to the Ninevites and their modern counterparts. It is not intended only for those who indulge in blatant immorality, injustice, and idolatry.

{Rev 3:1-2} When Christ Jesus says, **"You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die..."** he is not speaking to unbelievers. He is confronting the church in the city of Sardis.

✈ O God, if we really are ill, give us insight grasp the true character and severity of our sickness! In your grace, empower us to turn to you, humbly confessing our brokenness and genuinely repenting of our iniquity, that we might wake up and strengthen what remains! Do not merely forgive the guilt of our sin, liberate us from its controlling power!

? Do we recognize if we are sick or injured?

? Do we recognize the true nature and full extent of our sickness or injury?

It is vital to our bodily health and well-being that we do. It is immeasurably more important where the spirit is concerned.

The third chapter of Nahum is the word of the Lord.