

Explore the Bible Series for June 17: A call to remember who we are

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A call to remember who we are

- Nahum 1:1-3, 7-8; 3:1-7, 19

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“I never cease to be amazed at the degeneracy and depravity of modern man,” a coworker of mine said after a brief discussion of current events. In one sentence, he summed up the message of Nahum.

A quick survey of the headlines dispels the notion America could be characterized as a Christian nation. In fact, they give a description of America surprisingly similar to Paul’s description of the last days. “But mark this: ‘There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power’” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).



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The disturbing thing about this verse is that it refers, not to the condition of our world, but to the condition of our churches. Notice the last bit. In the last days, we will have a form of godliness without its power.

Throughout this study of the Minor Prophets, we have returned repeatedly to this theme. We as Christians must step up. We must stop playing church and take God seriously. We must return to him and reclaim the power that comes with faithfulness to him.

What has happened to modern Christianity? Like the Israelites, we have forgotten who we are. We have allowed worldly teachings and methods to draw us away from God. And we have polluted God's teachings with worldly wisdom. The results have been devastating.

Consequences of forgetting who we are

When we fail to recognize the high calling of wearing Christ's name, we dishonor God. And this is exactly what we have done. Most of us never open our Bibles except in church. Few of us talk to God, and even fewer of us allow him to talk back. We say we love him, but our actions prove otherwise. It is a love that revolves around ourselves, and that's no love at all.

The first result of our egocentricity is that we have lost touch with God and

no longer know him. We tend to visualize him as an old man dozing in a rocking chair on the porch of heaven. We think he doesn't see us or care what we do. We mistake his patience for forgetfulness. But Nahum tells us: "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet" (v. 3).

Believing we can get away with ungodly behavior, we take advantage of his mercy. When tempted to sin, rather than resisting, we give in. "God understands. He knows I'm weak. I'll ask him to forgive me later," we tell ourselves. We have grown so comfortable with the merciful God of the New Testament that we have forgotten the righteous God of the Old Testament.

But God hasn't changed: "I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed" (Malachi 3:6). God did not stop being himself when he gave us grace through Jesus. By treating him as if he did, we display our ignorance of him.

The second result of our egocentricity is that we have failed to reach our potential. From the beginning of time, God knew us and created a plan for our lives. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). But this potential cannot be reached without God's direction. When we live by the world's wisdom rather than God's, when we trust in ourselves rather than God, we separate ourselves from the resources that will lead us into God's plan for our lives.

We should lean on God to tell us how to live, yet we look to the world for their wisdom. We should trust in God, yet we trust only ourselves. We follow the foolish teachings of the world: "Look out for No. 1. If it feels right, do it. The end justifies the means." They are in direct contradiction to God's word, yet we continue to obey them rather than God.

Likewise, prevailing wisdom says God takes care of those who take care of themselves. But Nahum says differently. According to him, God “cares for those who trust in him” (v. 7). Those who take care of themselves are basically turning their backs on him and will be destroyed. By failing to live up to the potential God gave us at the dawn of time, we have traded in our glory, our uniqueness, for the dull sameness of the world.

And finally, far worse than losing God’s blessing, our egocentricity has brought God’s wrath on us: “‘I am against you,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame’” (v. 5). We will reap what we sow. We have shamed God with our disrespect for his holiness, and according to Nahum, he will shame us in return.

God’s mercy to the repentant

Nahum’s message is harsh, but it’s a message we need. We will never understand what it means to be children of God if we fail to comprehend the magnitude of who our God is. The world has devalued God, and we, in our failure to obey him, devalue him even more. We in the church tend to think of ourselves as part of a great Christian heritage. As a result, we feel no compulsion to live out that heritage. It’s much easier merely to talk about it.

Essentially, we have turned away from God. “‘Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their glory for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great sorrow,’ declares the Lord. ‘My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water’” (Jeremiah 2:11-13).

We must repent of our ways and purify our hearts. We must return to God’s

words, unadulterated by the world's teachings. We must humble ourselves: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Let's take God at his word. Let's honor him with our obedience and reclaim the glory that belongs to everyone who wears the name of Christ.

Discussion questions

- Describe God.
- Does your description come close to capturing the fullness of God's nature?
- Does your life really give honor to God, or do you merely give him lip service?
- What could you do to honor him more?

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