

Nahum's Greater God

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Preacher: John Lowrie

[0 : 0 0] street index at the front, otherwise you'll be shuffling away for ages. It's easily lost. It's at the end of the Old Testament amongst the minor prophets, the book of Nahum.

Usually in the churches where I've been, I've usually tried to encourage them at the very start of the year, the first sermon of a new year, to have a text for the year. We usually get them made up in a wee card, the verses on it, suitable image, and the idea is you give it out to family and friends, and they can do what you do, pin it on their fridge or whatever. Usually it can be a verse that's used to kickstart a new series, which sums up the series, and so it stays with you throughout the year, or it might just be a stand-alone message, a one verse that you can, throughout January, February, March, get to October, and just remind yourself of that one truth. It's a good idea. Time didn't allow us to get these cards printed or anything like that, and I'm not suggesting this is your text for the year.

It's just a one-off sermon as we begin the year, to encourage ourselves in God. And there is a verse in the first chapter that would be our verse for the year. But I want us to look at that verse, and I want us to look at it in context. And over the past few weeks, we've been encouraging each other with daily Bible readings. I don't know how you've got on, seven days into January, whether you've hit the buffers at day three, and your reading plan's just gone, been derailed, I don't know, don't beat yourself up, just get back in there again.

Regularly feed on God's Word, whatever plan you choose. As part of that, I mentioned to you a website called The Bible Project. And it's a great wee website to dip into now and again, especially if you want to know what a book of the Bible's all about. So unusually, I'm going to begin this sermon by showing you a video for five minutes that introduces to you the book of Nahum.

You might think, five minutes of watching a video, it will save ten minutes, me trying to explain to you the background of Nahum anyway. So Nahum, the book of Nahum is basically Jonah, the sequel, Jonah part two, after the people of Nineveh repented, this is what they get up to next, and this is how God relates to them. So we'll watch this wee video, and then we'll pray, and then we'll go straight to the text that we're looking at. We'll read chapter one. Thank you very much, Phil.

[2 : 3 0] It moves quite quickly, so you'll need to focus on this. They say a lot in it. The book of the prophet Nahum. This short prophetic book is a collection of poems announcing the downfall of one of Israel's worst oppressors, the ancient empire of Assyria, and its capital city, Nineveh. The Assyrians arose as one of the world's first great empires, and their expansion into Israel resulted in the total destruction and exile of the northern kingdom and its tribes. The Assyrian armies were violent and destructive on a scale that the world had never seen before, and so Israel and its neighbors were awaiting the downfall of Assyria, which eventually came in the year 612 BC.

The Babylonians rose up and began a rebellion that overtook Nineveh and brought down the Assyrian empire. And so chapter two depicts the fall of Nineveh in vivid poetry, and chapter three then explores the downfall of the empire as a whole. But this book isn't just an angry tirade against Israel's enemies. The introductory chapter shows us that there is way, way more going on here.

The book opens with an incomplete alphabet poem that began by describing a powerful appearance of God's glory. It's very similar to how the previous book, Micah, began, and how the next book, Habakkuk, is going to conclude. And it's God, the all-powerful creator, coming to confront the nations and bring his justice on their evil. And the poem opens by quoting from the famous line of God's self-description after the golden calf incident in the book of Exodus chapter 34.

The Lord is slow to anger. He's great in power. He won't leave evil unpunished. And so the rest of the poem goes back and forth, contrasting the fate of the arrogant, violent nations with the fate of God's faithful remnant.

When God brings down all the arrogant empires, he will provide refuge for those who humble themselves before him. Now, here's what's really interesting, is that you thought this book was only about Assyria. But Nahum actually nowhere mentions Nineveh or Assyria in chapter one.

[4 : 31] And when he describes the downfall of the bad guys, he uses Isaiah's language about the fall of Babylon, which happened much later in history. And not only that, Nahum also describes the downfall of the bad guys as good news for the remnant of God's people. It's a direct allusion to Isaiah's good news about the downfall of Babylon. And so all these little details from chapter one, they come together to make a key point. For Nahum, the fall of Nineveh is being presented as an example, as an image of how God is at work in history in every age, how he won't allow the arrogant or violent empires of our world to endure forever. So the message of Nahum is actually very similar to that of Daniel. Assyria stands in a long line of violent empires throughout history. And Nineveh's fate is a memorial to God's commitment to bring down the violent and the arrogant in every age.

With this perspective from the opening chapter, the book then returns to its focus on Assyria. And so chapter two describes the battle of Nineveh and the overthrow of the city in progressive stages. So first we see the front line of Babylonian soldiers. And then we read about the charge of the chariots. And then the chaos on the city walls as the city is breached. Then the slaughter of his people, then the plundering of the city. Chapter three goes on to describe the results of the city's downfall for the empire as a whole. So Nahum begins by announcing a woe upon the city whose kings built it with the blood of the innocent. It's an image of how injustice was built into the very system that made Assyria so successful. But their violence has sown the seeds of their own destruction. And so Assyria will fall before Babylon. The book concludes with a taunt against the fallen king of Assyria.

He's stricken with the fatal wound. And from among all the nations that he once oppressed, no one comes to help him. Rather they sing and celebrate his destruction. And that's how the book ends. Now this is a gloomy book, but it's important to see how Nahum's message addresses the tragic and perpetual cycles of human violence and oppression in every age. Human history is filled with tribes and nations elevating themselves and using violence to take what they want, resulting in the death of the innocent. And the book of Nahum uses Assyria and Babylon as examples to tell us that God is grieved and that he cares about the death of the innocent and that his goodness and his justice compel him to orchestrate the downfall of oppressive nations. And God's judgment on evil is good news. Unless, of course, you happen to be Assyria. Which brings us all the way back to the conclusion of that opening poem in chapter 1. Which tells us that the Lord is good and a refuge in the day of distress. He cares for those who take refuge in him. And so the little book of Nahum invites every reader to humble themselves before God's justice and to trust that in his time he will bring down the oppressors of every time and place. And that's what the book of Nahum is all about.

It's a good book. It's a very good book for our times when nations are rising up and God sees and he will deal with every sense of injustice, even at a personal level, at a national, at a global level as well. Let's read together chapter 1 and then focus on, see if you can note the verse or the text for the year. You could say in that sense that would be the case if we were doing that. So the book is quite gloomy in many ways. And first chapter is all about devastation. But there is one verse that just stands out and I want you to notice that. A prophecy concerning Nineveh, the book of the vision of Nahum, the Elkishite. 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. The Lord is slow to anger, but great in power. The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and in the storm. The clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up.

He makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither, and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. The mountains quake before him, and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire. The rocks are shattered before him. The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him. But with an overwhelming flood, he will make an end of Nineveh. He will pursue his foes into the realm of darkness. Whatever they plot against the Lord, he will bring to an end.

[9 : 34] Trouble will not come a second time. They will be entangled among thorns and drunk from their wine. They will be consumed like dry stubble. From you, Nineveh has one come forth who plots evil against the Lord and devises wicked plans. This is what the Lord says. Although they have allies and are numerous, they will be destroyed and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, Judah, I will afflict you no more. Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away. The Lord has given a command concerning you, Nineveh. You will have no descendants to bear your name. I will destroy the images and idols that are in the temples of your gods. I will prepare your grave for your vile.

Look there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace. Celebrate your festivals, Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you. They will be completely destroyed.

Let's pray. Let's come before God in prayer. Our loving Father, we thank you for your word. It truly is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Father, speak to us from your word now. Encourage us. Comfort your people. Lord, that even in the midst, Lord, of trials and difficulties that might face us, we might know that the Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble, and you care for those who trust in you. So, Father, be with us, we pray. Speak to us now, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You'd be really clueless if you didn't get the verse that really leaps out in the midst of all this wrath and holocaust. It's verse 7. Verse 7, the Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him. That is a great verse to take into 2024. We do not know what lies ahead. And this was a verse that, in the midst of verse first chapter, even into chapter 2 and chapter 3, in the midst of just wrath and anger, the fierce anger of God against this nation, Assyria, that the Lord would care for

His people in the midst of whatever faces them. We don't know much about Nahum. We don't know much about his background. We're not told much. We don't even know where Elkosh is. He's an Elkishite. We don't really know where that is. There's not a lot that we know about him. But his name means comforter. It's something that the wee video really didn't emphasize. It emphasized the main thrust that God will punish evil in nations and in people. That's why we all need a Savior, Jesus Christ, to save us from the wrath of God, the wrath that every one of us deserve because of our sin that separates us from God. And that's why we have a Savior in Jesus who reconciles us, who brings us back into fellowship with God.

And in this passage, Nahum, the very name of God, often chose a prophet that his name preaches more than what he would often say. He's there to comfort his people. 150 years or so previous to this, God wanted to comfort the Ninevites, the Assyrians, you remember. He sent Jonah, the prophet Jonah. In fact, here's a heads up. Once we, over the next few weeks, we'll look at one or two special topics in our midweek prayer meeting. But I've just bought 35 booklets on the book of Jonah. We will look at the book of Jonah. Jonah is all about the grace of God to the undeserving. 150 years ago, God wanted to comfort this nation and told them to repent. And you remember, Jonah didn't want them. He wanted them punished, and God's grace was meted out to them. Well, 150 years later, this nation grew to be one of the superpowers. The super—here's a map showing you the whole area, this dark gray area, is the expansion of their kingdom. They were so impressive. Under Sennacherib, he built fortified cities, gardens, the mathematicians, engineers. They were a very, very impressive superpower, if not one of the—probably the greatest power in the day. But they were notoriously violent and cruel. They crucified their victims. They hung them on their walls. They skinned them alive. Every other nation, they just ransacked wherever they went. And it's that that God rises up against, rises up against this nation. They had become a great superpower. And this shows you the area that they were able to cover.

[14 : 40] But then God says he speaks against them. And if you know your history, and you remember we did the Old Testament, looking through the Old Testament, you remember that later on the Babylonians, at this time, they are about twice the size of the Babylonian empire, twice the size of the Roman empire. But eventually, God uses the Babylonians to punish the Assyrians. This is how God works. He uses nations as he chooses. I don't know about you, but I think of Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, all the wars that we see.

God is still in control of these situations, very much so. And he orchestrates things according to his own will. But here we see the Babylonians will eventually rise up and speak against them.

But there is one thing the nation, that the wee video didn't show, and that's what I want us to look at. God was not only telling them that he was going to punish their enemies. He does this in such a way to comfort them. That's why verse 7 is such a comforting verse. It's where Nahum lives up to his name. And he comes, and he wants to show that God loves his people. He cares for his people.

And he will protect them, he will lead, and he will guide them. So let's consider the history of this, and what's actually happening here as well. You can just follow on. But you remember the background to this is that God had said to the northern kingdom, which was the bigger of the—you remember during Solomon's day, Solomon died and so forth. The kingdom was split in two. You had basically ten tribes and two tribes—Israel, Judah. The Assyrians had already come in and taken the ten tribes and basically destroyed them. They disappeared in that sense as a nation as the kingdom of Israel. But Judah, the remnant God, these two—this small nation, as it were—God said that he would preserve. He would preserve a remnant. And because Assyria had come in and already taken the northern kingdom, despite the fact that they were warned time and time again by the prophets you have in the Old Testament, that they were taken away, Judah felt it was their turn next. They had every reason to be fearful. Things were not good. And this is the scene you remember in Isaiah 38. In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign,

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, attacked all the fortified cities of Judah. And then we read in verse 4 of Isaiah 36, the field commander said to them, Tell Hezekiah what—this is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says. On what are you basing this confidence of yours? You say you have strategy and military strength, but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending? Look now, are you depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff that pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it? And if you say to me, We are depending on the Lord our God. Isn't he the one whose high places the altar Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, You must worship before this altar?

[18 : 10] Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria. I will give you two thousand horses stories if you can put riders on them. And then the leaders, if you know your Bible, said to us, they come and they say, Please speak to us in Aramaic since we understand it. Don't speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall. In other words, please, we'd rather you didn't speak like that. You're discouraging everyone. Just speak to us in Aramaic. Don't speak to us in Hebrew.

Hebrew. And this was just a red flag to the bull. And the commander says, Hear the words. He stands in and speaks out in Hebrew. Hear the words of the great king of Assyria. Don't let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you. Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the Lord when he says, The Lord will surely deliver us. This city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.

Do not listen to Hezekiah. And he starts to try and make peace with the king of Assyria. Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, The Lord will deliver you. Has the gods of any other nation delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? He comes to provoke them, this commander of the king of Assyria, in saying, You have no hope. There is no God who can deliver you. We, look at what we have done to the other nations. Therefore, bow down and serve us. So, it very much seems that Assyria was in control.

So, the questions that God's people have at this time are basically two. Does God still love them? Because the problem is, at this time, God's people are sinning. This small group of people in Judah, they are going the same way as the ten northern tribes, and they recognize they deserve what's coming their way. And they begin to wonder, will God deliver them? Does He still love them? And can He deliver them from this mighty nation of Assyria? So, that's what I want us to look at very briefly in the moments that remain. I've called this sermon, Nahum's Greater God. As great as Assyria is, as great as your problem might be this morning, the God of Nahum is greater than anything that you might face in 2024. Four things stand out very clearly in this verse, verse 7. First of all, he wants to comfort them by reminding them that the Lord is good. That's the first thing. The Lord is good. It's a very basic truth, because their religious life wasn't good. They really, they were sinning. They really weren't walking with the Lord as they should. Their confidence was low, because whatever you go through in life, it's great to wake up on a Monday morning, in a January, and know that God wakes up with you, that He neither slumbers nor sleeps, that He is always there.

You can speak to Him. You can pray to Him. It's half seven or six, whenever you rise from your bed, even before you get out, Lord. I thank you that you go with me into today. It's one of the greatest things. To not have that, to wake up and to rely on your own strength, luck, or fate, or whatever, is a dreadful, dreadful thing. I've started reading a wee podcast. I'm trying to get a new podcast just to kind of energize my thinking. I came across a wee article the other day. I just started to read it, and it was, the article was headed something like, the job of the Christian is to show the modern world that its values stink. That was the name of the title. The job of the Christian is to show the modern world that its values stink. And it says, its technology leaves us lonely. Its sexuality leaves us empty. And I thought, those are great things. Kids, technology, lonely. It's them and their phone, or whatever. Sexuality, be free, do whatever. It leaves you empty. It doesn't satisfy. Almost anything that the world presents to us as a good way to live fails at so many levels. Whereas the Lord, walking with him, you never fail. And that's what the Lord wants to remind them, that he is good.

[22 : 58] And look at Nahum, verses 12 and verse 13. Although I have afflicted you, Judah, I will afflict you no longer. You remember Hezekiah, when he was presented with us. Hezekiah is one of my favorite characters in the whole Bible. When he was presented by this commander, what did he do?

He prayed. You remember, he spread this before the Lord, the needs of the moment. Hezekiah received a letter from the messengers, read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord, spread it out before the Lord, and Hezekiah prayed to the Lord. O Lord, almighty God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heaven and the earth. O Lord, hear, open your eyes and see, listen to all the words that Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. He prayed. It's one of the best things you can do. Remember that the Lord is good. He delights to vindicate himself and to deliver his people. I was reminded in a wee illustration. Here's a picture of Joni Erickson. If you know Joni, she's well known. A teenager, she was paralyzed in a diving accident. This is her wedding day. She said this, and she relates her wedding day to God's love for the church. I thought it was just terrific. It says,

I felt awkward, she says, as my girlfriend strained to shift my paralyzed body into a cumbersome wedding gown. No amount of corseting and binding my body gave me a perfect shape. The dress just didn't fit at all. Then, as I was wheeled into the church, I glanced down and noticed that I had accidentally run over the hem of my dress, leaving a greasy tire mark. My paralyzed hands couldn't hold the bouquet of daisies that lay off center on my lap. And my chair, though decorated for the wedding, was still a big clunky gray machine with belts, gears, and ball bearings. I certainly didn't feel like the picture-perfect bride in a bridal magazine. I inched my chair closer to the last pew to catch a glimpse of Ken in front. There he was, standing tall and stately in his formal attire. I saw him looking for me, craning his neck to look down the aisle. My face flushed, and I suddenly couldn't wait to be with him. I had seen my beloved. The love in Ken's face had washed away all my feelings of unworthiness. I was his pure and perfect bride. I just think that's terrific. He's not worried. He doesn't see the gears and the ball bearings. He sees his wife. I've done so many weddings. I always smile at the bridegroom is dying a death. He's as nervous as can be. He really is. He's thinking, what am I doing? But yet, when the bride comes, you can see his next craning to see his bride coming down. And all the nerves go, and he's just full of love and joy. And this is the love that the Lord has for you and for me. Yes, we sin against him, but he loves us. He never stops loving us and caring for us. And that's what the Lord wants to remind his people. The Lord is good. He is a good God, and he wants to communicate that. Secondly, the Lord is also our refuge. Know that the Lord is good. He loves you because of his Son. Apart from Jesus, we would be under the wrath of God. But he has removed us. The destruction of the Assyrians is not for us. We are loved by God. But he is also our refuge.

The whole book of Nahum and the background to this is one of trouble about the Assyrians coming and the difficulty. And does God really love me? Does he really care? And God wants to remind him that he is good, and he is our refuge in times of trouble. And he is a holy God. He's a just God. And for me, I love this verse because of where it is situated. All the way around this one wee verse is holocaust.

It's devastation. It's wrath and anger and God being against this nation. And in the midst of this, it almost seems that this verse shouldn't be there. Because look at the verse. Look at the verse before.

[27 : 52] Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? Because wrath is poured out like fire. The rocks are shattered before him. And then verse 8. But with an overwhelming flood, he will make an end of Nineveh. He will pursue his foes into the realms of darkness.

And sandwiched between them is this one verse that comes just as a refuge. The Lord is good. The Lord is a refuge in times of trouble. Who can endure the fierce anger of God? People live today as if there is no God. There is no wrath of God. There's no anger. There's no separation from God.

Most people have no interest in God throughout their life except at a funeral. Their belief system is this. You die, you go to heaven. You see your relatives, your cat, your dog. They do not take seriously their own personal sin, that which separates them from God and the wrath of God. We are all by nature children of wrath.

The Bible makes that plain. That's why we need to flee to Jesus. He is our refuge. He is our strength. He is our comfort in the midst of such a storm. And it really is, I mean, even the picture that's painted here, it talks about Bashan withering, Carmel withering, Lebanon wilting. Bashan was famous for its pasture. It was the most fertile area of Judah.

And the Lord says, even that will be dried up. Carmel, famous for its vineyards, it will wither. Lebanon will wilt, famous for its forests. Even that will wilt as well. Verse 5, the mountains quake, the earth trembles. God is a powerful God. But for God's people, he is a refuge. He loves, he cares, he is a refuge. God is always slow to punish. But punishment is always inevitable. The world forgets or disowns it. If you've been reading Genesis, the early chapters of Genesis, I'm wading through Genesis as part of my daily readings, and you're reminded that God flooded the earth.

[30 : 10] And only those in the ark were saved. Only those in the Lord were saved. When God pronounced judgment on the world in Noah's day, it didn't come to 120 years later. When God told Abraham the Canaanites would be punished, it took 400 years. When God said to Israel that they would be punished for their idolatry, it took 210 years. God does not act swiftly, but he does act. And in 2,000 years ago, Jesus sent a Savior to die for the world. And how we respond to him, how we accept him as our Savior, will determine our fate, our destiny as well. Assyria's greatest sin wasn't just that they were going to punish God's people. But they spoke against God. They spoke against him. Who can deliver you? And Isaiah, we read in Isaiah 37, the son of Amos sent a message to Hezekiah.

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says, Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib, king of Assyria. This is the word the Lord has spoken against him. The virgin daughter of Zion despises and mocks you. The daughter of Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee.

Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel. They spoke against God, and God would vindicate his name.

He says, I remember just the first time I ever read that verse, I know where you stay. I don't know about you, but I used to get into trouble. I used to run an occasional gang or whatever. And if you ever got in trouble with somebody, you never wanted them to say, I know where you stay. I know where you stay.

You're suddenly filled with fear. There's no escaping. And the Lord basically says that to Assyria. I know where you stay. I know where you live. I know everything about you. And I will deal. I will protect my people, and I will deal with you. The Lord is our refuge in the midst of trouble.

[32 : 40] Whatever that is, the Lord knows how to protect us. If you've ever read Isaiah 37, you remember how all this comes about as well. The angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 people.

The Lord knows how to protect his people. The Lord is a refuge. You can testify that to 2023. He's brought you through to 2024. He's been your refuge. He is—the Lord, life hasn't always been easy.

He has been your refuge. He cares for you. He loves you. He's not out to hurt you. He's a good God. And he is your refuge. Anything that comes your way won't be by accident. If an arrow gets through, it's because it is part of his will. He is working in you. And he is your refuge. Thirdly, the Lord is caring. He cares. The Lord is good. He's a refuge. And he cares for his people. And you need that every day. He cares. One of—another great verse to have as a motto text is 1 Peter 5, 7.

You know that verse, don't you? Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Because he cares. You don't have to care. He cares. He knows. He cares for you. And that is quite something.

And in all the threats that will come our way, I don't think the Assyrians are going to come in 2024 and try and harm us in any way. But financial difficulties might be the threat that's coming your way. Maybe it's already there. Maybe family problems, family difficulties. Maybe it's personal problems, whatever that is. Maybe it's health, sickness, disease, illness. Maybe it's just a time of fear, anxiety. We do not know. Time of uncertainty. Maybe the government, local government, national government, maybe other nations. We do not know what threat might come your way and my way. But we can come and we can pray to the Lord and we can spread these things out before him.

[34 : 59] Jesus tells us, doesn't he, that two sparrows are sold for a penny. Basically, worthless. Half a penny, a sparrow. Very hairs of your head are numbered. So don't be afraid. Hear those words in 2024.

Don't be afraid. You're worth more than many sparrows. And it really is something that should comfort us and strengthen us. He cares. He cares. He sees. He knows. Even before we ask, before we pray, before a word is on our tongue, he knows us all together. Hezekiah did this. Lord, you see. You know. Spread out before the Lord. The Lord is good. He is a refuge. He cares. Therefore, come to him. And lastly, the Lord is trustworthy. He is trustworthy. The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him. Those—it's not a blanket thing for all, but it's for those who know him and to trust him. God, in 2024, wants one thing or two things from us.

He wants us to know him and to trust him. It's one thing to know him. It's another thing to trust him. Be anxious. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every supplication, in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Jesus says, do not worry, but we are to trust in him. Behind worry is lack of faith. In Luke 12, there's passage about do not worry. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, gone tomorrow, thrown into the fire. How much more will he clothe or care or be your refuge? Oh, you of little faith. He challenges them. God loves. He cares. He knows. Therefore, trust in him. Trust in him.

For those who trust in him. They find him good. They find him a refuge. They find that he cares. So, God expects us to trust in him. And that is why he says, and the book finishes in verse 15, or the chapter does, look there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace. And then he says this, celebrate your feasts, Judah. Fulfill your vows. In other words, what's he saying? Keep doing what you're doing. Don't forsake your worship. Don't forsake your celebration. Don't forsake your prayers. Keep doing what you're doing. I can look after these other things. As you enter into 2024, there are things that would cause you concern as a church. Your congregation's getting older. We're all getting older. We need more workers. We would love younger folk. We would love more older folk. We just want more people. I've been a pastor of five churches, previous to being interim pastor here.

And one thing that's common to those churches that grew and those churches that didn't grow was more workers. There's no shortcut. Pray. And the Lord, in his grace, levitated people through the door. We didn't need a great plan. We didn't need to have t-shirts and baseball caps and pencils and rubbers with verses on them and selling things and what have you. When I look back in the churches that grew, the Lord just sent the right people at the right time. He can do this. We don't need to be anxious and fret about that. We need to make ourselves attractive. We need to keep doing what we're doing, not crying until we're beer, saying, poor me, what's going to happen? It's worse than the Assyrians.

[38 : 49] The Lord knows, and he will lead and he will guide and be to us what we want. But we need to keep celebrating. We need to keep—here is this how blessed are the feet of those who bring good news.

You want to be blessed? Keep preaching. Keep preaching the good news. Keep sharing the gospel. Keep gossiping the gospel. Keep shining as stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.

Don't be downcast. Lift up those hands, those weak knees, and keep pressing on. That's how this chapter ends. Because of verse 7, keep doing verse 15. Keep pressing on. Keep serving him. May the Lord help us to do this as a church and as individuals, not to become weary, but to trust in him. The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him. We're going to sing an old hymn. In heavenly love abiding. You know that one well. No change my heart shall fear. The storm may roar without me. My heart may low be laid, but God is round about me. And can I be dismayed? Let's take this into 20, 24 as we stand and sing together.

in heavenly love abiding. No change my heart shall fear. And save this Don't change my heart shall fear, And save this much I'm fighting, For nothing changes fear.

The storm may roar without fear, My heart may love me, But God is wrong above me, And can I be to see?

[41 : 03] Wherever He may guide me, No one shall turn me back, My shepherd is beside me, Nothing shall I lie, His wisdom ever waken, His sight is never dear, He knows the way He'd taken, And I will wander with you.

Green pastures are before me, Which yet I have not seen, Bright skies will soon feel me, When a dark clouds appear, My hope I cannot measure, My path to life is free, My Savior has my treasure, And He will walk with me.

What a great, great truth to finish with. Can I encourage you to come out this evening, We are beginning a new series this evening, On the book of James, And it's a very important book in the scriptures, So if you can come out that, I'm sure you'll find that a blessing, As we think about what it means to live as a Christian, In 2024.

So that's a new series this evening, Let's just close in prayer. Our loving Heavenly Father, We thank you, Father, For not only that song we've been singing, But for your word. We thank you that you are a God, Who not only saves us, But keeps us.

You love us, You are good to us, Your desire is always to bless us, To mould us, And to shape us. We thank you, Lord, That you care for us, And you ask us, Lord, To take you, And to trust you, As a refuge into 2024.

[43 : 13] So, Father, Lead us and guide us, You are the potter, We are the clay. Mould us and shape us, Lord, According to your will, And help us, Father, To give us that faith that we need, As we move forward.

And we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, folks. You are, Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.