A Tragic End

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. We are back to Nahum in the Old Testament, and we've come to chapter 3.

! If you haven't already found Nahum, go ahead and do that or get a head start with that. But I want you to turn with me first to 1 John chapter 5.
Back toward the end of your New Testament, 1 John chapter 5. 1 John is such a great book of the Bible.
It's the primary place where I would go if someone was questioning their salvation. And if I could sum up 1 John in just 10 seconds, it would be to test yourself to see if you're in the faith.
And those three tests would be, what do you believe? Who do you love? And how do you live? That is the threefold test that you see in 1 John.
[1:15] There's a doctrinal test, what do you believe? There's a heart test, who do you love? And there is an obedience test, how do you live? And at the very end of this book of the Bible, the last chapter, the last verse, you can see it there.

It says, little children, keep yourselves from idols. This is the last word here in this letter.
Little children, keep yourselves from idols. It's a term of endearment. The word here used is not derogatory.
It's a term of endearment. It's the way that a father, a spiritual father, looks toward his children and wants to give them a word of caution, a word of warning, a word to guard their heart.
Keep yourself. Guard yourself. Protect yourselves from idols. Idols are an interesting thing because we typically associate idols either with some time period long, long ago, or we think of idols of some people far away.
[2:31] But we would understand that while they may not be made of metal or stone, there are plenty of idols that exist in our culture that people all around us are worshiping.

Anything that occupies the place in your heart that should be occupied by God alone is an idol.
Whatever is the central focus of your life, if it's not the Lord, is an idol.
Anything that is the controlling passion in your life, if it's not the Lord, is an idol. One good way to know if you have an idol is to ask yourself, what occupies your mind when you have nothing else to think of?
What dominates your thoughts, your heart, your passion when you have nothing else to think of? If it ever comes down to the question of, in your mind, do I have an idol, just ask yourself, is there anything that I love more than the Lord today?
I can remember being in elementary school at church and hearing a pastor talk about this topic.
[4:00] And I remember as a young child hearing this pastor say something to the effect of, you know, you can even have your spouse as an idol.

And he said, some of you love your wives too much. You shouldn't love your wives that much. And I thought to myself, that doesn't sound right.
How do you love your wife less? Well, I think a better way to say that is you don't need to love your wife less. You just need to love Christ more. You don't need to love Christ more.
Hobbies are good. Those are great. Job is good. You don't need to try to care less about your job or try to care less about the things that bring you joy.
Just make sure you love Christ more. So give more time to the Lord than those things. Give more focus to the Lord. Give more attention to the things of the Lord.
[5:07] Sometimes people love good things. In fact, I would argue most of the time, at least the people that we know and associate with, most of the time, our idols aren't sinful things.

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Our idols are good things that we have just elevated to the wrong place. And that can happen in churches. People can love structure or position.
Or tradition more than they love the Lord. 1 Corinthians 10.14 says, Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.
The closer our devotion is to God, the less we want things to dethrone Him. The more we cling to the Lord and the better we know the Lord, the more we want to protect that place in our heart that only belongs to the Lord.
Genesis 39.9 records this statement. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? We want to make sure that when we are tempted, we recognize that that temptation in that moment is trying to dethrone the Lord in that moment in our heart.
[6:18] We need to love God more. We need to love God more. Love the things of God more. Love His pleasure more so that we would choose to be obedient even when faced with temptation, as Genesis 39 reminds us.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Idols are dangerous things. And the hard thing about idolatry is, as I mentioned a moment ago, is idolatry can be something wicked and evil, but most often for us is not something wicked and evil.
It's something good or something neutral that we simply have elevated to too high of a position. And so rightly does the Scripture warn us to guard ourselves, keep ourselves from idols.
Well, in Nahum, we are, of course, about a century after Jonah. Jonah goes and preaches to Nineveh. Nineveh is the capital of the Assyrian Empire.
And you guys know the story. We've looked at it several weeks ago in here. Jonah does not want to go and preach to Nineveh. Why does he not want to preach to Nineveh? Because he knew that God was merciful.
[7:39] And he did not want the people of Nineveh to repent. And just as a way of reminder, if that sounds strange to you, and that's not the right heart or right attitude, I know, but we can understand it.

The people of Nineveh were awful people, filled with all kinds of atrocities. As the capital of the Assyrian Empire, they were the headquarters of all kinds of wickedness and all kinds of sin.
And it makes sense, humanly speaking, that Jonah would not love those people. Here's the problem. A love for God, faith in God, a love for the things of God, the humility that comes from being known that the Lord has redeemed you, ought to drive us to do something so crazy even as love our enemies.
And that's what the people of God ought to be known for. Not living just like the world, living counter to the world because of what God has done.
And so, in the book of Jonah, where we are a century before Nahum, he, as you know, disobeys. And in fact, if you're back to Nahum, go back to Nahum and then go to the book of Jonah for just a moment, if you would.
[8:55] And in the book of Jonah, Jonah, Micah, and Nahum. So, if you're in Nahum, just back to the left a couple of pages.

Chapter 2 is where Jonah has been swallowed by the fish. And here in the belly of the fish, Jonah prays. And in chapter 2, the Holy Spirit has allowed us to see and to read exactly what Jonah prayed in his darkest day, literally and figuratively.
And what he prays is the scripture. All of these verses are taken straight from the Psalms. But I want to draw your attention with 1 John 5, 21.
Little children, guard yourselves from idols in mind. In Jonah's prayer, chapter 2, verse 8, Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.
Translation, I memorized this in many years ago, said, Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. And that always intrigues me because Jonah, who has been cast overboard, thinks he's going to die.
[10:17] Swallowed by a fish, thinks he's going to die. Cries out to the Lord. And one of the things he prays toward the end of his prayer is reminding himself as he cries out to the Lord, Those who cling to worthless idols, those who are holding on to a worthless idol, forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

In other words, if they didn't cling to this idol that was worthless, they would have a different grace that otherwise they're not experiencing. And that intrigues me because I always think to myself,

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What idol is Jonah clinging to?
He's not clinging to his money. He's actually paid money to run away from God. He's not clinging to some price position as a prophet because he's disobeying the very one who called him to be a prophet.
He's not clinging to success in ministry because he doesn't even want to go and preach. And the reason he doesn't want to preach is he's afraid it will be successful. And he doesn't want it to be successful.
So that's not the idol he's clinging to. What idol is Jonah clinging to? And I think in Jonah 2, the idol Jonah has been holding on to is the idol of being in control.
[11:38] The Lord gave him a calling and he fought against it. The Lord gave him a mission and a message and he declined it. Jonah here, at least in the book of Jonah, is not clinging to money.

He's not clinging to success. He's not clinging to notoriety. He's not clinging to ministry fruitfulness. He's clinging to this idol of wanting to be in control.
If there is ever an idol in our world today that resonates with people, it's this idol of wanting to be in control.
I'd be quite shocked to find out anyone in the sanctuary tonight is going to go home and bow down to a graven image. That would surprise me if that's the case. It would surprise me if you have any structure in your house or in your property that you pay homage to.
That's probably not the idol that is luring us away, but I wonder if the idol of self-sufficiency or self-reliance or control could be something your heart struggles with.
[12:52] It was for Jonah. No. Ironically, Jonah, who had that as an idol, confesses that, receives mercy from the Lord, goes to Nineveh, calls them out on their sin.

They receive mercy from the Lord. Revival breaks out. And now, a century later, the people are right back to their idolatry.
This is the theme throughout all of Scripture, that those who reject the things of God give their hearts to idols. And so rightly does 1 John 5, 21 warn, little children, keep yourselves from idols.
Which brings us to Nahum chapter 3. Nahum chapter 3. We're going to look at verses 1 to 7 tonight. In verses 1 to 3, write down the word victimization. This is a list of what has happened to Nineveh as they have victimized those around them.
[14:12] Woe to the bloody city, all full of lies and plunder. No end to the prey. This is a statement of the crimes that they have committed.

This is a statement of emotion, of intense judgment. Look at your text here. It refers to Nineveh as a bloody city. It was exceedingly torturous.
It was known for its savagery. It says here in verse 1, They were full of lies. They were known to deceive nations. They were known to deceive their subjects. And Nahum says, There is no end to the prey.
He's using the picture here of a wild animal to describe the actions of Nineveh who went around victimizing everyone in their way that they could.
Just devour them. Just destroy them. It's how they lived. He speaks of the punishment they will endure in verse 2. The crack of the whip and the rumble of the wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot.
[15:16] Assyria who had attacked and destroyed many will soon hear the sound of war coming against them. Verse 3 describes it. Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, hosts have slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end.

They stumble over the bodies. For so long the Assyrians have unleashed their brutality upon others, and now they will be on the defensive, and then they will go from the defensive to the defeated.
Verses 1, 2, and 3 describe the victimization that they poured out on others, and then what would happen to them. Verses 4 and 5, we get the verdict on what's going to happen to them.
Here's their final verdict. Verse 4, And for all the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms.
This is a reference to their idolatry. The idols of the world had beckoned their heart, and they have fallen in love with them.
[16:39] They've given their heart to false beliefs. They've given their heart to false gods. And they have been charmed by that which cannot save. The language here speaks of harlotries and sorceries.

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The language in verses 4 and the 1st of verse 5 deal with pagan worship. And this is the final verdict on them. A century ago, there was the threat that God was going to destroy them.
Nineveh receives the mercy of the messenger, Jonah, who preaches a five-word sermon, yet 40 days Nineveh overthrown.
It tells us he just walked a city. Yet 40 days Nineveh overthrown. And God did what Jonah was afraid God would do.
He rained down mercy and he poured out grace. And these wicked, sinful, idolatrous people repented, but that revival did not last.
[17:52] And by the time Nahum comes on the scene, they have given their hearts completely over again to idols. Verse 5, here's the verdict.

Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts. If the Lord is against you, it does not matter who is for you.
Interestingly enough, in the New Testament, it says the same thing the other way, doesn't it? If God be for us, who can be against us?
If God is for you, you have nothing to fear. If you are on the Lord's side, no one can come against you.
If God is for us, who can be against us? For we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Yet the opposite, as we see in Nahum 3, is very true.
[18:54] If the Lord is against you, there is nothing that can save you. If you go back to chapter 2, verse 13, it's the same verdict again.

Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messenger shall no longer be heard.
If you oppose the things of God, judgment will come, and you will not be able to stand. This is the promise of Psalm 1, that the wicked will not stand in the judgment.
This is how serious idolatry is. So whether it's Jonah 2, Nahum 3, or 1 John 5, or anywhere in between, we must make sure we do not give our hearts to idols.
We are to love Christ above all things. Love Christ more. Verses 5 to 7, we see a third reality, and that's the vision that's given.
[20:09] Again, we're watching play out in real time what is about to unfold. Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and here's what's going to happen. First, they will be disgraced without clothes, is the metaphor.

I will lift up your skirts over your face, and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame.
It's quite a graphic illustration, isn't it? Particularly insightful when you consider the strength of Nineveh as Nahum writes this.
He's not talking to an empire on the brink. They are strong as he writes this. A century ago, when Jonah preached, they were struggling a bit more.
By the time Nahum is on the scene, they're as strong as they've ever been. But the word of the Lord says, the verdict is, I am against you, and the vision of their punishment is quite striking.
[21:25] I will lift up your skirts over your face. I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame. This city, this empire, this capital that has been, and in present day, as he writes this, is so strong and so powerful and so great in a human sense of reckoning will soon be shamed and disgraced.

Not only will they be disgraced without clothes, they will be displayed without knowledge, verse 6.
And I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle.
And the sin of Nineveh and its idolatries are completely distasteful. And they're going to be treated with contempt. They're going to be treated as if they don't know anything.
Today, they seem strong and powerful and with all authority and yet soon, they will be disgraced and they will be made a spectacle.
They'll be made something to see, something remarkable, not in a positive way, but in the way of the effects of judgment. And the idea here is there is nothing that they can do about it.
[22:54] Even though the vision has been given, they have knowledge of what is to come, yet even with the knowledge of what is to come, they will not be able to stop it.

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And we can read this and say, if the word has been given to them, why wouldn't they change? Why wouldn't they repent?
Why wouldn't they learn from their mistakes? And the answer is because their hearts loved idols and people who give themselves to idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs exactly as Jonah prayed.
But even what Jonah prayed in chapter 2 in the belly of the fish was exactly what the psalmist had already said. This has always been the warning for people to not give your heart to idols because you forfeit the grace that could be yours.
Well, the vision goes on in verse 7 and speaks of their devastation that they will experience. And all who look at you will shrink from you and say, Wasted is Nineveh.
[24:01] Who will grieve for her? Where shall I seek comforters for you? In other words, you're going to be destroyed and nobody's going to care.

This really is a sad reality. I mean, just imagine if in your life, if you lived your life in wickedness and sinfulness, if you didn't treat people well and you didn't obey and follow the Lord, there is at least one reality that seems to permeate even people like that at their funerals.
At least people say something good of them. Even people who were known to treat people poorly when they die, there's somebody who stands up and will say something good about them.
And even if other people there are thinking, Are you sure you're at the right funeral? At least somebody says something good. In the picture here in verse 7, In other words, there is no one there to speak words of comfort.
It's a bit of a play on words here as well. Comforters comes from the same root word of the prophet's name, Nahum.
[25:40] Nahum's name means comfort. And here is Nahum, the prophet, speaking of coming judgment. The one whose name means comfort says Nineveh will be destroyed and there will be no one there to comfort them.

In the end, with Nineveh and in human history, the Lord will bring justice to all who have opposed him and the comfort that will elude the idolater will be forever present with the believer.
This is the amazing thing about the gospel. The entire book of Nahum is all about condemnation for the wicked and comfort for the believer.
And the interesting thing here is that the people of God who will hear this prophecy, who themselves are going through dark days, looking at Nineveh, who looks like they could never be brought down from their pedestal, are told the day is coming where everything will be made right. Where those who have opposed the Lord will be condemned and those who love the Lord will be comforted and the idolater will never have the comfort that will never leave the one who is trusted in God.
[27:12] And here, this vision of what is to come is made crystal clear before it ever happens so that the people of God can know you can trust the Lord to make all things right.

Trust the Lord. Now, I end here on purpose because if there is one idol that may be a temptation for you, even for those who love the Lord and care about the right things, it can be the idol of trying to make sure you get to see justice done in your way and in your time.
But you have to leave that to God. You have to trust the Lord to make all things right.
And the evil that you see around the world or the evil that you see in your own sphere of where you live or the evil that someone has done to you, whatever it may be, you may not get to see that brought to its rightful conclusion in your way or in your time, but trust the Lord in the end will make all things right.
The idol of self-control, the idol of self-sufficiency, the idol of wanting things your way, your time, that is an idol that if you cling to it, you forfeit a grace that could be yours.
[28:56] There is a grace that comes from just trusting the Lord and refusing to cling to the idol of trying to be in control.

little children, guard yourselves from idols. Not just idols made of wood or metal or stone, but the idols of the heart that call you, try to charm you with the delight of saying, couldn't you be in control of this?
And instead saying, no, I will trust the Lord. That's the comfort for the people of God. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

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Lord, we thank you tonight for your word and for the comfort that it brings us and even for the conviction that it brings us. We see in Nineveh in the Old Testament what idolatry looks like. May we despise any idolatry in our own heart even more and may we instead receive and enjoy the grace that could only come from trusting in you.
[30:18] In Christ's name, Amen. God bless you. You're dismissed. God bless you. Most people can only show me that's what we want to come and ask you to ask you and most people are left in your room and know that it really may be as if you locus that's what you want to see.

Thank you.

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