

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS
May 2, 2010

Text: Nahum 1:2-11

I wonder if the National Day of Prayer Task Force had any idea how prophetic their theme would be for this year. I don't know how far in advance they select the theme, Scripture, and material artwork for the annual National Day of Prayer, but I suspect that they began their planning for 2010 quite some time ago. I know that everything was in place well ahead of April 15, 2010. What's significant about that date? Well, in addition to our annual federal tax deadline, it is also the day that a federal judge ruled in favor of a case lodged by the freedom from religion foundation. The judge declared that the recognition of the National Day of Prayer service is unconstitutional. I'm not quite certain what is meant by that, but that is the ruling of this judge. How much more of a prophetic dimension, then, is the challenge issued in year's bulletin insert: "Each of us can play a role in moving the seemingly insurmountable mountains in our culture. As millions of Christians unite in ongoing supplication for our beloved country on the National Day of Prayer, imagine the outpouring of heavenly power possible! We are called to stand in the gap 'for such a time as this.' Please join us in a commitment to prayer for our nation at this crucial juncture." (Bulletin Insert NT410, The National Day of Prayer Task Force, 2010) As the Task Force expresses so well in the theme statement, we need "prayer for such a time as this."

Perhaps even more prophetic than the theme chosen by the Task Force is the theme Scripture from a portion of Nahum 1:7, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him." Now this sounds like an appropriate Scripture to go along with National Day of Prayer services, but I discovered an even more fitting lesson. The book of Nahum the prophet is about the predicted destruction of Nineveh. "What an interesting connection with this year's National Day of Prayer," I thought.

Nineveh was once the oldest and greatest cities of Mesopotamia. It was the capital of Assyria at the height of that empire. As you can see on the map, it was located along the Tigris River in the northern part of modern Iraq. In fact, the city of Mosul is at or near the location of ancient Nineveh. Our familiarity with Nineveh no doubt comes from the book of Jonah where that prophet was chosen and sent by God to preach repentance to them. There is roughly fifty years between the writings of Jonah and Nahum. From our perspective, Nineveh would be insignificant and

unimportant if there had not been so much written about it in the book Jonah.

Nineveh was hardly insignificant and unimportant. As I mentioned, it was once the greatest city in all of Mesopotamia. It was a part of great empire. Sadly, it was an extremely cruel empire. By their own inscriptions found in archeological artifacts, the Assyrians were ruthless in their conquering destructiveness. Small wonder that Jonah tried to rebel against God's instruction for him to go preach forgiveness to that city. Many more Israelites would have slept better at night if God had destroyed rather than forgiven that city full of evil Assyrians. However, as the book of Jonah bears witness, "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened." (Jonah 3:10)

In the course of about fifty years, though, it looks like any desire to humbly repent and submit to God was completely gone. Nahum writes what Jonah probably wishes he could have written, "'I am against you,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'I will burn up your chariots in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will leave you no prey on the earth. The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard.'" (Nahum 2:13) What brought Nineveh to this point? Among the charges God brought against them were idolatry and extreme cruelty. The book of Nahum ends, "Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?" (Nahum 3:19) God has never taken kindly to those who reject Him by creating and worshiping false gods and who seek to do harm to His people. The Assyrians did those things, and their empire is no more.

This is the broader context from which the National Day of Prayer Task Force took their theme Scripture. In the midst of the prophecy of Nahum describing the ultimate judgment upon Nineveh are a couple of sentences of fulfilled hope in the promise of God: "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him." (Nahum 1:7) For such a time as this, Christians in America must recognize that we face a distinct crossroads that determine whether America remains as a "city on the hill" or faces the same fate as Nineveh and the empire of tyranny it represented. If we look back at history with honesty and integrity, I do not think that America could ever rightly be called a "Christian nation." If we had ever truly been a "Christian nation," I think that our history would have been joyfully better. Nevertheless, America has decisively been a nation of Christians during its history and, sadly, never before have we seen such an assault on the Christian heritage and traditions of this nation from within. Never before have we seen such an assault directed toward Americans who are born-again Christians from within. Our nation's first president, George Washington, would have been utterly amazed to learn that a national day of prayer is unconstitutional. Shirley Dobson, chair of the National Day of Prayer Task Force, writes, "In 1789, only a few days after the passage of the First Amendment... Congress asked President Washington to declare a national day of thanksgiving and prayer, and he issued the proclamation shortly after on October 3, 1789. More than 600 public proclamations have been recorded since that time, and 33 of our 44 presidents

have made such declarations.” If Christians throughout this nation do not recognize and understand that we have been placed here “for such a time as this” to stand in defiance of those who seek to destroy the Christian faith in this nation and around the world, then we can be assured that our fate will be the same as that of Nineveh.

“How do we begin?” some may ask. Well, let’s begin where the National Day of Prayer Task Force asks us to begin: with prayer. We must pray with fervor, sincerity, and devotion. We must recognize prayer as our dedicated conversation with God. I am not concerned about what form it takes. Like many others, I frequently pray with my “head bowed and my eyes closed.” Some find it meaningful to kneel. All of these represent ways to appropriately express our humility before God. But let us not forsake prayer for the sake of form. I have prayed when I am walking a trail or pacing the floor or driving down to Indy for a hospital visitation. I have prayed while standing, sitting, and lying down. You probably have, too. My point is that we must be busy engaging God in prayer. And you know what? When that is our desire, it will happen because God wants us to engage Him in prayer. It is His will for us to pray. When Hezekiah became King of Judah, he moved to correct the evil disobedience of his predecessors, including even his own father. He purified the Temple and celebrated the Passover. 2 Chronicles 30:27 testifies that, “The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people, and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place.” God wants us to engage Him in our prayers, and every time we do, we will be successful for it is God’s will to pray to Him.

“Prayer for such a time as this” is a call to action. Prayer is a call to action because when our lives are truly engaged with God, we will not remain the same. Contact with God causes us to want to walk closer and closer in His righteous, loving will. We want to live with greater obedience to His instructions, and we want to proclaim His merciful goodness to an unsaved world. Active prayer actively changes us.

There is another event in Israel’s history that the National Day of Prayer theme directs us to. It is the book of Esther where God’s direction of events in the lives of enemies of God places a young maiden into a high position of influence in the Persian Empire. Upon learning of the plot to slaughter the Jewish people throughout the empire, Mordecai contacted his cousin Esther, who was now Queen to the Persian King Xerxes, to persuade her to attempt to intervene on behalf of her people. When she hesitated, indicating the her life was in danger if she attempted to approach King Xerxes without his invitation, Mordecai responded, “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13-14)

If that doesn’t get your heart rate up, I don’t know what it will take. God wants us to call on His name. He delights when His people call upon His name. Additionally, He responds to the prayers of His people. In Genesis 18, God revealed to Abraham His

intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their unrighteousness. In response, Abraham asked, "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?" (Genesis 18:23-24) God answered, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." (Genesis 18:26) With boldness and humility, Abraham continued to ask the Lord if He would spare the city for the sake of the righteous. Forty-five. Forty. Thirty. Twenty. Each time Abraham asked, God declared that He would not destroy the city for the sake of the righteous. Finally, Abraham said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" God answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." (Genesis 18:32) God wants us to intercede for the sake of the righteous.

Likewise, God has a heart for the unrighteous – the unrepentant sinner. Responding to critics and skeptics, Peter writes, "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:8-9) We were all in this condition at one time, but praise the Lord He delayed until such a time as we could let the Spirit begin taking control of our life. Regardless of how long the Lord delays, though, this is certain: He does not want the time spent by those seeking to destroy the Christian faith. He wants the time spent by those seeking to hear and do His will. He wants the time spent by those who are calling out His name in prayer. We are here, Christian, for such a time as this!

So what do we do? Hopefully, we continue to do what we have been doing. By that, I mean, serve God. A lot can be done by just a few who are dedicated in their service to the Lord. We just finished our study of the book of Acts in my Bible study. Those earliest followers of the risen Savior were clearly few in number, yet before their deaths, they saw this great faith – this great love for Jesus – spread from Jerusalem to other towns in Israel to trading centers throughout the Mediterranean basin and to the very heart of the Roman Empire itself. All from a faithful few who were devoted to their service to God. What do you think that they would do if they were living now and were told that the National Day of Prayer was unconstitutional? I can tell you what they would do: they would pray and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Dare we who have been so magnificently blessed by God Himself do anything less? "Please join us in a commitment to prayer for our nation at this crucial juncture." "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him." (Nahum 1:7) Prayer for such a time as this.

Rev. Charles A. Layne
First Baptist Church
179 W. Broadway
PO Box 515
Bunker Hill, IN 46914

765-689-7987
bhfbcb@bhfirfbaptist.com
www.bhfirfbaptist.com