

## **"ZEPHANIAH, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**November 2, 2025, 6:00 pm**

**Text for Sermon: Zephaniah 1:1-7a; 3:14-20**

### **Introduction.**

Zephaniah begins with the longest genealogy of any prophet in the Bible. He traces his ancestry back to his great-great-grandfather, Hezekiah, king of Judah. So finally we have a prophet who is a somebody, a descendent of royalty, a true blue-blood, and not just any royalty, but a good king.

Zephaniah prophesied from Jerusalem during the time of the good king Josiah (640-609BC). I wonder if people were expecting more of a party line from him, something more favorable to those in leadership, something that would tickle the ears of the political and religious powers.

The first sentence out of his mouth dispelled every such foolish notion. "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth." And then as if that wasn't enough, he ups the ante in verse 8, "I will punish the officials and the king's sons."

Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah. That means that they had the saddest of all the prophecies. Zephaniah and Jeremiah were called upon by God to announce the last warnings and final appeals to His remnant people in Judah, the southern kingdom, before God's judgment came upon them.

Zephaniah and Jeremiah both lived to see the fall of Jerusalem and the fall of the temple of God, the great temple Solomon built. They saw the great and terrible day of the Lord in their own time and land.

We have seen the Gospel again and again in the OT and Zephaniah is especially full of gospel.

It begins with the most sober announcement of our sin against God. Then comes the announcement of judgment on our sin.

Then finally comes the good news of mercy, hope for sinners.

Zephaniah begins with no hope, then a glimmer of hope and finally a full display of a glorious hope. Zephaniah is the *tale of two days*, two days of the Lord, a day of judgment and a day of jubilee.

### **The Day of Judgment.**

This book mentions the day of the Lord more than any other book in the Old Testament.

How great will the judgment be? The judgment will be *universal in scope*. In poetic fashion 1:3 describes a reverse creation, where everything God created will be wiped from the face of the earth in reverse order.

Every nation will fall, every person will face judgment (3:8). On this day God will exercise His absolute sovereignty over all the earth. God is a God of love and He is a God of judgment. There is no harsher depiction of the dark side of God than in the book of Zephaniah.

The day will not only be universal in scope but *comprehensive in severity*, 1:14-16.

Why? Many reasons.

### **Idolatry, 1:4-6.**

They bowed down and worshipped idols, lots of them. They bowed to Baal, the god of the Canaanites, to Milcom, the Ammonite god, to the hosts of the heavens, to the moon god, the sun god. They tried not to offend any god and, in the process, offended the one true God (1:6). They felt peer pressure, cultural pressure, to bow to the gods of the age, they became religious pluralist.

Worshipping God and something else is not worshipping God at all. It's patronizing God and marginalizing God. A car can't have two steering wheels, and we cannot serve two masters.

Is there a more arrogant man on the face of the earth than the man bowing before a god he has created in his own image?

### **Complacency, 1:12.**

This complacent nation says, “*The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill*” (1:12). They are practical atheists. “God hasn’t done anything for so long, either everything is fine or there’s no God.”

This is breathtaking arrogance. And it is all around us in our world today.

Atheists who deny the existence of God.

Materialists who say matter is all that counts, there’s no spiritual realm.

Existentialist who say only this life holds any significance.

Secular humanists who reject the supernatural.

Universalists who say all will go to heaven.

They all say good and evil are of no consequence, right and wrong don’t matter in the end, we can eat, drink and be merry.

**Zephaniah 3:2** She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord; she does not draw near to her God.

The essence of their sin is self-sufficiency. They do not need God. The last stages of sin are complacency and indifference.

### **Shamelessness, 2:1.**

**Zephaniah 2:1** Gather together, yes, gather O shameless nation.

What is a shameless nation? A nation without shame is a nation without repentance. A nation without shame is a nation deep in sin and not only are they not concerned about it, they are proud of it and even flaunt it and feel no shame for doing so.

What is a shameless nation?

A nation that has gay pride parades is a nation without shame.

A nation that spews billions of dollars a year worth of pornography is a nation without shame.

A nation that slaughters a million innocent sons and daughters a year is a nation without shame.

A nation that sends its women off to fight our wars is a nation without shame.

A nation that displays the desecration of the marriage bed on big screens and little screens is a nation without shame.

A nation that kills its elderly and calls it mercy killing, a nation that funds its education with gambling, that's a nation without shame.

A nation without shame has leaders and judges who don't stand up or don't say anything about any of this, and even condone it.

A nation without shame has churches that wink at it or remain silent to it.

A nation whose national heroes and role models in politics, sports and entertainment lie, cheat, do sex tapes, sleep around and have serial marriages, say one thing and do another, call good evil and evil good, is a nation without shame.

A nation without shame is a nation that mocks and ridicules and makes fun of those who preach warning and judgment. A nation without shame calls the gospel intolerant and a call to repentance hate speech.

We are already a nation under the judgment of God. All of these things are God's judgment and punishment.

A nation without shame for its sin must do one thing. There is only one thing that can be done, it must repent. The great day of the Lord is hastening near (1:14). Seek the Lord, seek righteousness, seek humility, and perhaps God will relent (2:3). God is always near to the repentant. He is always ready to receive those who repent.

The book of Zephaniah contains no direct Messianic prophecies, but the Babylonian judgment would be a foretaste of the eternal judgment that will come when Christ returns in glory.

That judgment foreshadowed another judgment, the final day of the Lord. John the Baptist warned of this day and the repentance necessary to escape "the coming wrath" (Matt. 3:7).

**John 3:36** Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Pray for righteousness, pray for holiness, godliness, purity, for a revival of true worship.

### **The Day of Jubilee.**

The glimmer of hope in 2:3 turns to the glory of God's grace in 3:9-20. This is the rest of the gospel and here it is in the OT.

There are some portions of the Bible that are written to overwhelm us with God's grace, mercy and love. There are some passages that are meant to flood our souls with indescribable joy. Zephaniah 3:9-20 is one of them. This passage has been called the John 3:16 of the OT.

The prophecy ends with an incredible promise of restoration and hope. Here is the unspeakable, breathtaking news that the holy, just, righteous God of the universe takes such thought of us that He exalts over us with enthusiastic singing.

What a contrast. There is no more terrifying picture of God's cosmic judgment than in Zephaniah 1:18. And there is no more exhilarating picture of the pinnacle of God's saving love than in Zephaniah 3:17. The extent of the restoration will reach out and embrace all humanity. It is the John 3:16 of the OT.

This is heart of the gospel. Their sin and shame are removed (3:14-15). No judgment, just justification. When Jesus endured the wrath of God's judgment, He took it all, all of it for us. Jesus' blood hides all our transgressions.

### ***But there is more.***

The most amazing promise of all is in verse 3:17. Can you imagine God rejoicing over us?

When God looks out over heaven and sees ten thousand upon ten thousand saints, when He looks out over all who are saved, what will He think?

Will He think, “what a motley crew, what a wretched bunch of sinners, what a bunch of miserable betrayers? Will He be disappointed? Will He think, well they believed Jesus so here they are, given what I had to work with, it is what it is.”

He will rejoice. He will exalt with loud singing.

He will see the fruit of Jesus’ sacrifice.

He will see the glory of Jesus in our hearts.

He will see us without spot or blemish, made pure and white in the blood of Jesus.

He will see the good work begun on earth, now brought to glorious perfect completion.

There’s no holding back, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will God rejoice (Isaiah). Get this, as great as your joy will be in heaven, God’s joy will be greater.

Spurgeon once said, “Believer, you are happy when God blesses you, but not as happy as God is.”

***Remember the prodigal son***, who was happier when he came home, the son or the father? God’s heart is larger than our heart, His joy will be larger than our joy.

We must banish from our minds forever any thought that God admits us begrudgingly into his kingdom. God welcomes us with bells on. He puts a ring on our finger, kills the fatted calf, throws a party, shouts a shout that shakes the ends of creation, and leads in the festal dance (John Piper).

God rejoices over us with singing. “I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people” (Isaiah 65:19). God loves us so much that He breaks out into singing.

***Do you believe this?*** Do you believe God absolutely delights in you and breaks out into exuberant song over you when He thinks of you? Do you believe that?

Or do you think He's so displeased with you? Do you think you aren't worthy? Do you think God could never sing over you?

But God knows your thoughts. He says in 3:15, "I have taken away all your judgment."

Yes, He knows you have sinned, He knows all your sins better than you do. But do you understand, He has taken away all your judgments, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

No, you say, there are too many reminders all around you every day of your failures, your shortcomings, other people who are only too happy to beat you down or steal your joy, people who remind you that you are a worthless nobody.

God knows what you are thinking. He answers that too, 3:17, He is the mighty one who saves you and redeems you and rescues your life from the pit. He is the mighty warrior who defends and protects you and delivers you.

No, you say, you have too much shame, you never live up to His standards. You are a Calvinist after all, you are totally depraved, you are chief among sinners, you just aren't good enough. God is always a distant God to you, you have never felt very close to Him.

God knows what you are thinking and He answers that too, 3:15 and 17, "I am the Lord your God in your midst. I am your very own God, and I am with you, close beside you. I am the king of Israel and I am in your midst, you never need fear again or feel shame again."

All your shame and guilt and sin and judgment and condemnation have been taken away.

**Zephaniah 3:19** Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.

Consider the magnitude of our deliverance and salvation. We are delivered—saved, purified, cleansed, put back together, sanctified, justified, made holy, grown up into maturity—to such an extent that God Himself bursts into song at the sight of us.

**Ephesians 1:16-19** I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.

All who trust in Jesus for their salvation and for their deliverance from judgment, for them there's a coming day of jubilee and no one will be more jubilant than our God. The fullness of His joy will be our lasting joy. Yes we will sing (3:14) but our heavenly anthem will be drowned out by our heavenly Father's singing (3:17).