



## **The Faithfulness of God---Believe it!**

Zephaniah 3:9-20

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-You know, beloved, I am not much on New Year's resolutions because what I have done in the past is make a bunch of promises that I never intend to keep. It's usually something like I am going to exercise more, get into shape and eat rightly. And I usually do that until someone puts a piece of pecan pie in front of me and then my resolutions go out the door without much conviction at all. And I know I am not by myself---I don't even have to ask.

-But one thing that I pray we do more this year than we have in the past is to trust in the faithfulness of God and love Him more. To be fully convinced that He is able to do what He has promised and to grow in our faith with no wavering. To really believe, more so and more so, that God is God and there is no other and that His promises will come to pass because He says so. That we would believe that every word of His proves true. That's my prayer for you and for me.

-As we have been studying the command to love the Lord God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, it has been wonderful and helpful to see the heart of the Father for His children. To know that the Father did not withhold His only Son but sent Him to bear the wrath for our sin in our place as our substitute is amazing. To know that God delights over us because when He looks at us He sees the perfect righteousness of His Son is amazing. To know that nothing---absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God in Christ is amazing. To know that my faith is a gift from a faithful God that is personal and finds its object to be in a person and that of Jesus Christ is amazing. God's plan of redemption is not just a story or something that is just to be used to make someone feel good about themselves but it is real fact and it is real, personal and it changes hearts and lives. Hopefully, it has transformed and changed you. To know that God's promises will come to pass and His plan will be accomplished because He is God and there is none other and He says that it will should be a great comfort to us and a rock for us to stand firmly on. God is faithful and He can be trusted with all of life. Let this be the backdrop of our message today as we turn to the glorious Word of God in Zephaniah.

-As you turn there let me just give you some background on Zephaniah. We don't know much about him except his name and the short genealogy he gives us. His ministry took place during the reign of Josiah, the last godly king of Judah. His prophecy takes place a few years before the exile of the Israelites to Babylon. Zephaniah draws on the prophecies of other minor prophets and most theologians think that Zephaniah serves as a summation of those prophecies which is why he is last in the canon for the pre-exilic prophets. So with that being said, let's dig in to the word of God.

-“For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering. “On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD, those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.” Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. 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. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the LORD.” (Zephaniah 3:9–20, ESV)

-You know, if you read enough of the minor prophets, that their message that is reiterated over and over is the coming judgment of God. They don't mince their words concerning this. And because this is true, any real attempt to study and apply this message can be somewhat oppressive and depressing. It really can. And this leads to the first thing that I want us to see today.

1 – No matter how depressing the message of judgment in the Minor Prophets becomes, it is never the final word of God for the people of God---in other words, sin will not have the final word!

-The message of judgment in Zephaniah is severe. Let me give you some examples.

-“I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. “I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. “I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests, those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens, those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom, those who have turned back from following the LORD, who do not seek the LORD or inquire of him.”” (Zephaniah 1:2–6, ESV)

-“I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the LORD. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.” (Zephaniah 1:17–18, ESV)

-“Therefore wait for me,” declares the LORD, “for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.” (Zephaniah 3:8, ESV)

-This is the message of a holy and sovereign God to His chosen nation. He gives the same message to all nations. Think about the Bible as a whole. Many of its books end with no so good a message---you know we like the good mushy endings. If you watch a movie with a bad ending you always feel like you have wasted your time---precisely why I don't watch movies. Look at the way Genesis ends---Genesis 50:26 “So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They

embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.” Not the best ending for a book huh? Look at the last words of the Old Testament---Mal 4:6 “lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” The last words for 400 years. Wow, this can be depressing---but it’s not the last word to God’s people. The Bible ends with these words in Revelation---“He who testifies to these things says Surely I am coming soon. Amen, Come Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen!

-There is always hope! Usually even the judgments themselves offer hope because the threatened destruction is only if the people refuse to repent. And after the worst of these judgments there is always some word of hope and blessing. God is faithful!

-Praise God! What a joy this is! Sin does not have the last word. Evil will not triumph. The devil will be judged. What an encouraging word in this depressing lost and dying world we live in!

-And that is what we find here in Zephaniah in the passage that we are looking at today. In this last section that we read, God’s judgment is not the last word for His people. There is a promise that there will be a regathering and blessing of God’s people. This promise does refer to the regathering of the Israelites after the 70 years of Babylonian captivity but it also has a meaning to point to the final gathering of God’s people in the heavenly Jerusalem which includes us who are in Christ. Oh, how we should be looking forward to this gathering and how it should encourage us and cause a glorious anticipation for the return of Christ. The words of Titus ring true.

-“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:11–14, ESV)

-This is the last word for the people of God and it is a glorious word of grace and peace in Christ. But the fact is that this new day of blessing from God is not for everybody. Not all will

be included. Zephaniah indicates that this is true when he uses the words “those who are left in Israel” which some translations use the word remnant. There is a new day dawning but only the true and righteous children of God will be a part of that remnant. The question is this then and it is a question that must be answered because the answer is a matter of eternal life or eternal death and it is this. Are you a part of that remnant? Are you one that will actually rejoice at the dawning of this new day of God? Some of you here may be saying “I don’t know the answer to that question---I don’t know if I am a part of that remnant---how can I know? That leads us to the second thing that I want us to see.

2 – Zephaniah gives us three ways by which you can know whether you are one of God’s children.

-His list is not exhaustive but very helpful---let’s look at them.

A – You can know whether you are among the people of God or not by asking yourself whether you “call upon the name of the Lord” and serve Him shoulder to shoulder with other believers (9-10)

-““For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering.” (Zephaniah 3:9–10, ESV)

-Calling upon the name of the Lord is not a casual thing. It’s not like we just give up some pop call for a minute and we are done. Calling upon the name of the Lord is to be done with a wholehearted trust in Him and a wholehearted worship of Him to the exclusion of others. This is what Zephaniah is meaning when he talks about pure speech. It’s a transformed and converted life that loves Christ supremely and does not allow anything to come before Him.

-This is in direct contrast to the message of Zephaniah to the idolatrous priests and people. The priests were claiming to be the Lord’s servants but they also served Baal. The people would

swear by the Lord but they would also swear by Milcom---a god of the pagans. Words are cheap! What is in the heart matters. And it is not enough to just do work and think we are serving. There are many people who are at church every time the door opens and they do this and they do that and they think that their works of service are enough but they don't have a clue what a personal relationship with Christ is. Beloved, please listen to me. It doesn't matter what you do---if you don't know Christ personally and you place your faith in what you do or what you do is your god, then the only words you can expect to hear from Jesus is to "depart from me for I never knew you"! Paul wrote to Titus that Christ died to purify for himself a people zealous for good works. That's why we do what we do---because of a love for Christ because He died in my place and I love Him!

-So my question to you is this. Have your lips been purified and has your nature been transformed so that you call upon the name of the Lord and you worship and serve Him only? Is Christ supreme in your life? Beloved, this is no game so be honest with yourselves.

B – You can know whether you are among the people of God by asking whether your pride has been conquered by God and you are left humble and lowly before Him (11-12a).

-““On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly.” (Zephaniah 3:11–12a, ESV)

-God hates pride and arrogance. He hates it because we have absolutely nothing to boast about as if we deserved glory.

-“The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.” (Proverbs 8:13, ESV)

-God will not leave you in your pride and arrogance. Now this does not mean that we will not have to battle pride. We have not achieved perfection here. But it does mean that there will be a profound and massive change in our heart.

-Think about it. Before salvation we were proud and we refused to bow down to God. We thought that people should bow down to us even if we didn't act it out like that. We regarded our life to lived for our own benefit. Look out for number one was our motto. Then, then we met Christ and we saw Him for what He truly is---the King and Lord of life, of my life, and when we saw Christ like this we came to the realization of just how sinful and rebellious we were and we repented and were changed. We turned from pride and humbly called out for mercy and grace from our Savior.

-My question to you is this---is this the case with you? Has this been your experience? Have you seen Christ for who He really is and humbled yourself and cried out to Him for grace and mercy and to save you? If not, please listen to me, if not then you are not a true child of God. If not then you are not a part of the remnant that Zephaniah speaks of here. The testimony of Scripture is that we are "saved by grace through faith—and this is not from yourselves it is the gift of God—not by works so that no one may boast." Please, answer the question today. I'm begging you to repent and believe in Christ---He is the only way of salvation and today is the day for it.

C – You can know whether you are among the people of God or not by asking yourself whether you are living a holy life or not (12b – 13).

"They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD, those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.'" (Zephaniah 3:12–13, ESV)

-The people of God will have the desire to live holy lives---to do no injustice, to speak no lies, and to have no deceitful tongue. Again, this does not mean moral perfection but it does mean a life that is not characterized by sin and it does mean the beginning of and a progress in life to obedience to the commands of God from the heart.

-John says in 1 John 2:3

“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.” (1 John 2:3, ESV)

-John is writing to Christians in his letter and he is giving them tests by which they can know that they truly know God and one of those tests is obedience. Jesus said that “if you love me you will obey my commands.” This does not mean perfect obedience because we sin and if we claim we don’t then we are liars. But our aim should be not to sin. True believers don’t seek to use grace as a license to sin but they hate it and fight it.

-And beloved, there is no escaping this test. There will be no entrance into heaven by the unholy.

-“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14, ESV)

-This is what Zephaniah is saying. If you are among those who have been touched and changed by God and who love Him, you will be striving to do what God says to do. You will want to obey Him and you will be doing it more and more. Wanting to obey Christ is most important in living a life of holiness.

-And so I ask yet another question. Is obedience to Christ the desire of your heart? Are you striving to live a life of holiness because you love Christ?

-There is a new day coming for the people of God that is marked by peace, joy and security but it is only for God’s children. You need to ask yourselves these questions: 1) are you calling on the name of the Lord wholeheartedly and desiring to serve Him only 2) has your pride been

broken and are you humble and lowly in God's presence and 3) are you desiring to live and grow in holiness by obeying the commands of Christ out of a love for Him? If this is not true of you then you need to repent and cry out to God to save you and you need to submit your life to the Lordship of Christ and you need to do it while there is still time.

-And those of you who this does describe please listen to me. Just because you are saved does not mean that you can put your life and faith on cruise control and do nothing. You must pursue Christ and you must fight sin because sin is deceptive and Satan is powerful. There is not one person in this church who is so solid that they cannot be overcome by sin if they stop engaging in the battle to fight it. Not one. Don't let that be you! We need each other. We need to practice the word of Hebrew 3:13.

-“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” (Hebrews 3:13, ESV)

-Now, for those of us who are in Christ and belong to the remnant that will enjoy this new day of God's blessing then this last section is for us. Notice what Zephaniah tells us to do.

3 – The people of God are to sing, shout, rejoice and exult with all your heart! (14-17)

-“Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” (Zephaniah 3:14–17, ESV)

-We are told to sing aloud, to shout, to rejoice and to exult. What does this mean?

-sing aloud = to sing in triumph and joy

-shout = to split the ears

-rejoice = to be glad, joyful and merry

-exult = to jump for joy

-Well, after Zephaniah's message of judgment, why would he tell the people of God to do this? He gives some reasons.

1 – We are to sing and shout and rejoice and exult because our sins have been forgiven. Look at verse 15 again “The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; He has cleared away your enemies.” Our sins have been forgiven and Satan, our enemy, has been turned away and defeated. Oh, beloved think about this. Don't let the words of forgiveness just roll off of our lips and not affect our hearts. God has not withheld His only Son but sent Him to die so that our sins could be forgiven. Think about what God has done in Christ. God has declared us not guilty. When the evidence of our guilt was unquestionable and we deserved nothing but death and hell because of our guilt of sin, God has declared us not guilty. That just doesn't make sense. We would be outraged if our judicial system worked like that. That if a guilty criminal came before the judge and the judge just declared him not guilty but free to go. That's not right. But that is what God has done in Christ. Christ has paid the penalty of death for our specific sins so that God remains just and the penalty of sin paid for and so that we can be forgiven. God himself, took on flesh and came and lived a perfect life and earned perfect righteousness only to die a death that we deserved. And God has declared us not guilty. And God could have stopped there but He didn't. Not only has He declared us not guilty of our sin but He has declared us righteous and clothed us with the righteousness that Christ earned. When He looks at us He sees his perfect Son's righteousness---that's amazing and too good to be true but it is. That's why God, as Zephaniah tells us, rejoices over us with gladness and comforts us with His love and exults over us with loud singing. It's because of what Christ has done in our place. It's because Christ has accomplished atonement for us. It's because we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. I know of nothing greater to sing about than that beloved. God is reversing the fall of man and bringing us back into His presence.

And that leads us to the second thing we need to be singing about.

2 – We are to sing and shout and rejoice and exult because God is in our midst---God is with us. Zephaniah tells us twice that God is in our midst. Here is here. Think of these verses.

-“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” (Psalm 23:6, ESV)

-“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20, ESV)

-Think about Adam and Eve in the garden. They sinned and they knew immediately that there was now a barrier between them and God. Before they were willing to meet and commune with Him and now their desire was to hide from Him. When God called to them and confronted them in their disobedience they blamed and hid behind their excuses. And as punishment for their sin, God sent them out of the garden and His presence and the relationship was no longer at peace but enmity.

-And now in Christ, we have been reconciled and now God is in our midst and we are in His presence. What joy we should find in reconciliation! What joy to have our sins forgiven and the lost relationship between ourselves and the Holy God restored. Praise God in Christ and sing beloved. Sing and shout the victory in Christ.

4 – The promised Restoration (18-20)

-“I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. 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. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the LORD.” (Zephaniah 3:18–20, ESV)

-As you read this, I can see Zephaniah thinking about the coming Babylonian invasion and the restoration of the people to their homeland following exile. But these words have application to all of God's people and to an even greater gathering of God's church. The regathering is a gathering of the entirety of Christ's flock. There is a glorious day coming when Christ will descend and destroy evil and take us to be with Him. Be encouraged by these words.

-“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, ESV)

-Beloved, be eagerly awaiting the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ because He is coming. But this day will not come until the bringing in of all of the redeemed that will make up the flock of Christ. And praise God that He will accomplish His plan of redemption.

-This brings us to the last observation from this text beloved.

5 – We can trust in the sovereign faithfulness of God and His ability to accomplish His will!

-Just look at how many times in this last section that God says “I will.” Starting in verse 17 just look at this.

-Read it from the Bible and look at the "I will's" of God.

-Beloved, God is mighty to save and we can trust the promises of His word. He is not obligated to save but His heart is to do it and He will. He sits in the heavens and does what He pleases. He created the heavens and the earth and nothing is too hard for Him. There is no heart too hard that He cannot break and change and there is no sin that He cannot forgive. We always have hope in Him and we can always trust in Him even when the circumstances seem very bleak. You can trust that everything that He does is perfect and right and just and according to His will.

-And beloved, always remember what Christ has done. Atonement has been accomplished and our hope is found there. Our hope is in a person not some myth or just some story. Christ and His work on the cross is the center of reality. God's plan of redemption will come to pass and that's a fact. Faith is not to be based on feelings and emotions but on the fact that God is God and Christ has paid the penalty for your sins. And if you are a true child of God and you begin to doubt His saving power then just look in the mirror. He saved you! Then look around in this church. What you see is the power of God to save in the gospel of Christ. He purchased this body with His blood. God is mighty to save beloved and He will do it. Don't let any distrust make you waiver in your belief but grow in your faith by being fully convinced that God is able to do what He has promised!

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