

The Lord Your God is With You

Andrew Neville 8/11/20

Zephaniah

Sermon Summary

Zephaniah was a contemporary of Habakkuk, Obadiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel who all lived during the times of the Assyrian Empire's decline and the rise of the Babylonian Empire. Zephaniah lived and wrote during King Josiah's reign 641 BC to 609 BC.

Pastor Andrew opened with an anecdote about a time in his boyhood when many of his teachers were invited by his parents to a party in their home. Those teachers, who were strict disciplinarians at school, suddenly became fun-loving, happy humans. This perplexed Andrew deeply because he had never seen that side of them before.

God's love is something like that. Yes, there is a judgment to come for some, but, for others, His love is beyond measure. The message from Zephaniah can be summarized: God is with those who repent and believe in Him.

Zephaniah is probably the fiercest of all the prophets. He describes God's action as sweeping away everything on the whole earth when God's judgment falls on all people (Zephaniah 2:1-3).

King Josiah was one of the good kings who tried to steer the nation back to God, but it was happening slowly. Zephaniah is warning the people that God will not tolerate sin and allow it to prosper forever. The day of the Lord is coming when all sin is judged.

Old Testament prophecy always has two horizons: one near and one far off.

Wherever God finds sin, He judges it. And so it is with the house of God first; Judah is to be judged (Zephaniah 1:4). Those who worship false idols and do not seek God (Z. 1:4-6) will become silent when the day of the Lord is near (Z. 1:7).

But not everyone will be destroyed, for God will consecrate those He has invited (Z. 1:7). God is not going to totally forsake those whom He has specially chosen, only those who have deliberately walked away from him, those who have become complacent (Z. 1:12). On these God must act.

In chapter 2, Zephaniah describes Judah as a shameful nation, and one which must come together before the appointed time arrives (Z. 2:1). This gathering is for the sole purpose of humbly seeking God and righteousness so that they might be sheltered from the coming wrath (Z. 2:3).

From verse 4 of chapter 2 thru to verse 15, God picks 4 nations from the 4 cardinal points of the compass surrounding Judah, to pour judgment on them: to the north, Assyria; to the

east, Moab and Ammon; to the south, Cush; to the west, Philistia. Verse 10 describes what will happen to them for insulting and mocking God's people.

Then, in the 3rd chapter, Zephaniah turns his attention to the future of Jerusalem. He has many harsh things to say about the people of Judah, His chosen ones. He describes the officials of Jerusalem as roaring lions (3:3), her prophets as arrogant (3:4), the people as unrighteous without shame (3:5).

But the end of the chapter is a glorious message of hope. Zephaniah's book begins with some of the most frightening descriptions of God's coming judgment, yet finishes with some of the most profound and beautiful statements one reads in the Bible (Zephaniah 3:9-20).

Zephaniah 3:14-17 has a chiasmic construction. [The "ch" in "chiasmic" is pronounced as "k." P.] The verses begin with Sing – Shout – Rejoice by God's people (v.14) and end with Rejoice – Be Silent – Sing (v.17) by God himself.

Verse 15 gives the reason for the rejoicing, because the Lord has taken away their punishment.

Verse 16 is a segue to the reverse. It tells the people not to fear; not to adopt a mode of despair by allowing their hands to hang limp.

Rather, "Rejoice for the Lord God is with you, He is mighty to save" (Z. 3:17). This is equivalent in impact to the N.T.'s John 3:16 (the GREAT LOVE of God). Then God "will quiet you with His love" followed by "rejoicing over you with singing" (Z. 3:17).

God takes great delight in us despite our shortcomings and failures. God Himself takes time out to be quiet – silent – thinking about you. How many minutes, hours perhaps, have we ever devoted to simply thinking about God – not reading his word and meditating – just thinking about His wondrous love for us? Time is usually too short, too brief for us. That's our excuse. Isn't it fortunate, for us, that God is not constrained by time. He can spend all the "time" He wants just to be silent (many translations put "no longer rebuke," but Andrew prefers "be silent") watching and thinking about us while managing the whole universe simultaneously.

Today we often think of the God of the Old Testament as being severe and judgmental, almost without love. Yet Zephaniah shows us that the Old Testament picture of God is no different from the loving God of the New Testament.

People quote endlessly the great passage in John 3:16. It is the elementary principle of Christianity, as though nothing else mattered. Yet just 20 verses further on – John 3:36 – is a serious reminder that God has different plans for those who refuse to repent.

Don't push away from God!

Will you have a God who will punish you forever or one who will love you forever?

Discussion Questions

1. **Read Zephaniah 1:1-18.** Do you dislike the idea of God's wrath resulting in eternal damnation? Explain.
2. **Read Zephaniah 3:1-8.** Why are God's people Israel subject to such judgment? Have you ever been critical of the Jewish people for falling away from their faithful God?
3. **Read Zephaniah 3:9-20.** What happens for the remnant of the faithful of God's people Israel and for those who come to this same God as repentant sinners?
4. **Reread Zephaniah 3:14-17.** Is the idea of God's taking delight in you a new thought?
5. Have you ever felt unloved by God? Describe those circumstances.
6. Have you ever felt truly loved by God? Describe those circumstances.
7. Let us follow the advice of chapter 3:14 and sing, shout and rejoice. What song shall we sing?
8. **Reread Zephaniah 3:17.** Meditate now on God's taking great delight in you and rejoicing over you with singing.

Prayer Suggestions for Life Groups

We rarely advocate praying for the release of Christian prisoners, but in the case of Twen Theodros she has been held in a shipping container in Eritrea for 16 years without trial for being Christian. Pray for her release. (Read about her harrowing story by Googling her name).

End of Life Choice. Pray that whatever their situation, people will always choose life eternal in Jesus, turning end of life choice into a choice for the beginning of life.

Pray that as a Christian community, Northcross may know, savour and be strengthened by, the truths in Zephaniah 3:17.