

The Songs of the Gospel

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Date: 26 November 2023

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[0 : 0 0] the Lord. Amen. This is God's Word. God's people are a people who sing. We've already had the chance to enjoy that together. And maybe we don't think about it much, but I guess church is one of the few public places where people will sing together regularly and often. I imagine for those of us who are Christians here today, we have favorite psalms, we have favorite hymns that we sing, those ones that we really look forward to in public worship, indeed those that in ways make up the soundtrack for our lives, those ones that we turn back to when times are hard, those songs that we turn to when we find ourselves rejoicing. There's a power, there's a beauty in the songs that God's people sing. As we sing together, they unite us in our faith. They are both worship that we offer to our God, but they are also a testimony to one another. We remind ourselves, we encourage one another about the truths that we believe about our God and about our salvation. As we sing, we can bring courage to our faith. We can bring comfort in the midst of despair. We find at the end of Zephaniah's prophecy so much singing and rejoicing. So for those of us who haven't been here for the last couple of weeks, as we've worked our way through Zephaniah's prophecy, he keeps bringing our attention to the day of the Lord. This decisive moment in history when God will judge his enemies and wickedness once and for all, and will establish his kingdom that will never end. In chapter 1, the message was, be silent, because the day of the Lord brings awesome judgment. And in the light of God's holiness and his justice, there was that call to be ready. In chapters 2, in the beginning of chapter 3, there was that call to seek the Lord, for God's faithful people to wait with hope for that deliverance that would come with the day of the Lord. And now as we come to chapter 3, verses 11 to 20, we're invited to understand that for those whose faith is in Jesus, we will rejoice on the day of the Lord.

And we're given songs, joyful songs, to sing about our great God and Savior and the salvation that he gives to us. Zephaniah tells us that we should sing the gospel, that we should celebrate together the good news of God's salvation. But more than that, there's a second song, another gospel song, and a beautiful song.

And in some ways, maybe it's even harder for us to appreciate. It seems almost too mind-blowing in its reality, because as we listen in, and especially to verse 17 there, we're told of our God and Savior, who positively sings with joy over his redeemed people. That's part of the gospel. So in these two songs that we're going to think about, we are invited by our loving Savior God to enjoy his salvation in the present, and to recognize that this salvation gives hope for our future also. So we're going to focus first of all on the song of salvation, just to recognize one or two things before we get into the content. Who is singing? First of all, look with me at verse 14. It says, sing, daughter Zion, shout aloud Israel, be glad and rejoice with all your heart, daughter Jerusalem. All that language is intended to say, it's the people of God who are singing this song. In chapters 2, verses 7 and 9, it's the people of God who are described as the remnant, those who remain faithful, even as the rest of society turned away from God. Those who place their hope in God continue to trust in him. Then last week, we remember in chapter 3, verses 9 and 10, the people of God are a global community of worshipers.

It's people drawn from many peoples, all united in the praise of God. So when we hear daughter Zion, Israel, Jerusalem, it's a picture of the united gathered people of God. And there's a beautiful transformation that's happened. You know, this city that is singing, at the beginning of chapter 1, it was a city known for being rebellious and defiled. So something has happened. Here is a people who've been redeemed by God's grace. And so this city that was so corrupt becomes a great choir singing praise to God. And this city choir represents God's church in all times and places. It represents us if our faith is in Jesus this evening. So that's who is singing. I want us also to notice how they are singing. What's the tone? Some of you might know the musical comedian Bill Bailey.

He's an incredibly talented musician.

He's a funny guy as well. Well, he has a great sketch on the difference between the major key and the minor key. And one of the things he does in that sketch is he flips the American national anthem and he plays it all in minor key. And it moves from being really celebratory and rejoicing to sound really gloomy.

[6 : 04] What's the tone? What's the tone here in verse 14? Sing, shout aloud, be glad and rejoice with all your heart.

This is joy. This is sing your heart out. Worship for the people of God. It's also a song of faith. In verse 15, it says the Lord has taken away your punishment. He has turned back your enemy. But at the time of Zephaniah's prophecy, this hadn't happened yet.

This is a salvation that is to come, but it is so certain because it's rooted in God's character and promise that they can sing with that confident expectation that it will happen. So they are waiting people, but they're waiting with joy and expectation. Because they're confident in God's character and promises they can sing of future salvation.

I think in that sense it captures where we find ourselves today. You know, we stand between these two comings of the Lord Jesus. Jesus has come once in humility and he's come and he's done that decisive act to save us by dying and rising, but we're still awaiting people. We're waiting for his return.

For that once and for all end to evil, for establishing the new creation. But we are invited to wait with joy, confident in God's character and his promises.

[7 : 45] So that's who's singing and how they're singing. Let's think about what are they singing. And what they're singing here at the end of chapter three are redemption songs. They're singing the gospel.

So again, just to remind ourselves of some of the themes that we've been thinking about in Zephaniah, as the Old Testament people of God anticipate the day of the Lord, as they anticipate the Lord Jesus coming to bring the day of the Lord, there were notes where we thought about his first coming.

They were looking forward to God being with his people, to God coming to purify, to gather a people to himself. But there are also these notes that speak of his second coming, of dealing with evil and establishing the new creation. And even as we come to these final songs of salvation, we're going to hear some of these different notes and melodies running through. One note that we definitely hear in this section of chapter three of this song of salvation is of shame removed. So take a look at verse 11.

On that day, you, Jerusalem, will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me. Because I will remove from you your arrogant boasters. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill.

There is this picture running all the way from verse 11 to verse 15 of a city under siege, a city under attack. It's a scene we are all too familiar with as we watch our news cycles play out.

[9 : 26] But now the scene has changed. Now it's of a city that is safe and secure because the attackers have been turned back. And peace has been established. And this city that had known humiliation now honor returns.

Zephaniah and the other Old Testament prophets had that job of warning Jerusalem of attack and exile that would happen. It happened with the Babylonians in 586. And as the prophets announced that they were also calling the people to a patient trust in their Savior.

And to anticipate that transformation of fortunes. And here there is this picture of a city that is transformed. How is it transformed? It's transformed firstly because the proud are removed.

Those who turn their back on God and say we don't need God. The proud have been removed. The humble are being kept. Those who take refuge.

Those who trust in the Lord. And we discover there are people who have been made pure by the work of God.

[10 : 35] They will do no wrong. They will tell no lies. They're walking in justice. They're walking with truth. And then you get this lovely picture at the end of verse 13. They will eat and lie down.

And no one will make them afraid. Zephaniah brings back that shepherd and sheep image. So the city is transformed in our mind's eye from a peaceful place that knows honor return.

Now it's like a sheepfold. Where there's absolute security. God the shepherd allowing his faithful people who trust in him to rest secure.

He guards the gates. He cares and keeps. The question that we need to ask is how can this transformation happen?

How can the shameful nation, God's very honest, you've acted shamefully towards me. How can this rebellious city, how can their shame turn to honor?

[11 : 35] And we need to ask that because that then becomes really personal when we think about ourselves. We rebel against God's word and God's law.

We carry the shame of our sin and our guilt. How can our shame, how can anyone's shame be turned to honor in God's eyes? We need to hear the gospel.

Galatians 3, 13 to 14 tells us how. Galatians 3, 13 and 14. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Here's how it happens. Jesus takes the curse and the shame that we should have to face the penalty for and he dies there on the cross on our behalf, redeeming us, setting us free so that we might know blessing, so that we might know honor, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit and knowing God with us so we can sing for joy.

[13 : 03] Because in the gospel, through Jesus, shame is removed and turned to honor. There's another note in this song of salvation that speaks of removal, this time of punishment removed.

Verse 14 into verse 15. Sing, shout aloud, be glad and rejoice with all your heart, daughter Jerusalem, the Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy.

So again, throughout Zephaniah, there is that honest warning from God's Word of judgment that falls on sin, on rebellion against God, on injustice and idolatry of many kinds.

But here, the people of God have a promise that on the day of the Lord, the punishment would be removed.

Those enemies would be taken away. And key to this is the end of verse 15. Over and over in Zephaniah's prophecy, he is giving hope to the city, which represents the people of God, saying, the Lord is with you, the Lord is in you, do not fear.

[14 : 40] If we want to think about it in other terms, it's like when you watch the Batman movies, it's like the hope for Gotham City. Okay, the Joker is here, or whoever the bad guy is, and they're causing terror, but Batman comes, and the scene changes.

Or it's the joy of Narnia, when Aslan comes and goes into battle. There is joy for the people of God, knowing God is with us.

It's the Lord Jesus who is near, and he fights for us. And so there's this gracious promise for those whose faith is in Jesus, of salvation beyond judgment, that here is the Lord of covenant faithfulness. And he announces that he is the Lord who is present with his people. When does this happen? When does what's anticipated by Zephaniah happen?

Well, let's listen to John chapter 12, verses 13 to 15, and notice the way John deliberately picks up some of these themes and words from Zephaniah and applies them to Jesus.

[15 : 54] John 12, 13 to 15, they took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Blessed is the King of Israel. Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it. As it is written, Do not be afraid, daughter Zion.

See, your King is coming, seated on a donkey's coat. As John thinks about all those Old Testament prophecies from Zechariah, from Zephaniah, from other places, he understands the coming of King Jesus fulfills this promise.

Here is Jesus riding into the city, into Jerusalem, the humble servant king for his people, and he is riding right into the heart and into the heat of spiritual battle for you and for me, taking the punishment so we don't have to.

Jesus moves from this, you know, being greeted with great joy shortly after to going to the cross to die. And there that great reversal happens where Jesus takes his people's punishment and gifts us his peace.

[17 : 15] And in so doing, there is that great victory that is happening on the cross. In those three days, the cross, the burial, the resurrection, Jesus is fighting. Jesus wins the spiritual battle, the only victory in history that will never be reversed.

Satan is defeated. Death is crushed to death so that we can know that there's no condemnation for us when we're trusting in Jesus.

So there's this great salvation coming and Zephaniah encourages us to look forward, to sing with hope. People in his day were singing with hope. We look back, don't we?

We sing with joy and gratitude and we look forward and we sing with hope, anticipating Jesus' return. The gospel says we don't need to live with fear of being condemned when our faith is in Jesus.

Christ has fully paid the penalty for our sin. He has fully drained the cup of God's wrath. There is nothing left for his people. The holy and awesome judge is our Father in heaven.

[18 : 27] Here's another wonderful note in this song of salvation. It's as we see a homecoming that is promised.

Again, we have seen on our news in the last couple of years people fleeing from war, cities under siege, and people having to leave with nothing.

so many internally displaced people, so many refugees, and the longing. We hear it on the news all the time, don't we? We just want to go home. We just want to live in peace.

We want to go back to the place where I belong. Zephaniah anticipates both the exile that would happen because of sin and because of judgment and a glorious homecoming because of saving grace.

And we find it here in verses 19 and 20. And again, Zephaniah likes sort of repeating ideas. There's been a gathering theme. Chapter 1, there was a gathering in verses 2 and 3, a gathering to experience judgment.

[19 : 34] Chapter 2, verse 1, we see the people of God gathering to seek mercy. Here in chapter 3, verse 19. At that time, I will deal with all who oppressed you.

I will rescue the lame. I will gather the exiles. Verse 20, at that time, this is God speaking, I will gather you. At that time, I will bring you home.

There's a wonderful promise here, a reminder of this new status that we enjoy as the people of God. Once more we know, honor, honor among the peoples. Fortunes have been restored. Enemies have been dealt with. And there is this glorious promise of a homecoming. Salvation as homecoming to a father.

Jesus anticipates that, doesn't he? Think about Luke chapter 15. That wonderful story of the prodigal son who, having made a mess of his life, he comes to his senses and he returns, not knowing what he's going to receive.

[20 : 36] He knows he doesn't deserve to be called a son to his father, but his father joyfully, lovingly welcomes, forgives, restores him to honor, throws a feast, calls him home.

Jesus tells that story. Salvation story. John 14, Jesus spoke to his troubled disciples, anticipating the cross. What did Jesus say?

My father's house, there are many rooms, heaven like a home. Jesus said, I'm going there to prepare a place, preparing a place for his people through dying, rising, returning to heaven, and I'll return to take you to be with me.

The ultimate aim of the gospel of our salvation is to be eternally home with our God, with our Savior. There is an end promised here to suffering and shame.

There is the certainty of security and salvation that is home. All because of Jesus. That's why we read Revelation 19 and 21.

[21 : 48] We heard God's people singing, didn't we? Hallelujah chorus. Why were they singing for joy there? As John in his vision was looking ahead to the end of time, there was the point where evil has been defeated once and for all.

Babylon defeated. Image of all that is anti-God. And once evil has been removed, that gives way to joy. Unbreakable joy.

And so there is songs there at the end of Revelation because of the reign of God. There is joy because of the wedding feast to come. Feasting.

Homecoming. There is joy because there is the new city in which God dwells with his people. And there is no sadness. There is no suffering.

There is no death there. It is our true home. It is the world we all long for. And we come to know it. And we are trusting in Jesus.

[22 : 48] who gets to sing this wonderful song? Notice that Zephaniah says there are certain people excluded. It is not the proud.

It is not those who say they don't need God or don't want God. It is the meek and the humble. Those who know that all that we have comes from grace. It is those who are lame.

It is the exile. We bring nothing to the table. Everything comes from God so all glory belongs to God. Zephaniah anticipates the songs of the gospel.

When our faith is in Christ there is always there will always be a salvation song to sing. And you know we could stop there and we thought about wonderful things haven't we?

The gospel is wonderful. The song of salvation is a glorious theme. But there is that other song the song of the saviour. It would be a song we could hardly believe we could hardly claim for ourselves unless it was here in God's words.

[23 : 56] It's here verse 17 again. The Lord your God is with you the mighty warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you.

In his love he will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing. the Lord sings. The warrior king God with his people sings and sings with joy.

Hearing this song we've been thinking about Christian identity for the last couple of months.

Hearing this song is crucial for a healthy Christian identity. Praying that the spirit would help us to believe this would be true even of us.

Learning to celebrate the God who celebrates over us. That we might live knowing this to be wonderfully true weak as we are struggling and limping along as we are to know that when our faith is in Jesus when we are in Christ God delights in us.

He rejoices over us. It's like a glorious love song. It's like Adam singing over his beautiful bride in Eden.

[25 : 10] We discover this wonderful truth that the Lord Jesus the great bridegroom sings over his bride the church. The bride he makes beautiful by his grace.

This warrior saviour he has fought to save and rescue and purify and deliver this warrior saviour now sings with joy over his redeemed people.

joy for Jesus took him to the cross. The joy of knowing he was doing his father's will. The joy of knowing he would purchase a people for himself with his blood.

The joy that will be complete for Jesus only when he is united to his people for eternity. there is still joyful anticipation in the heart of Jesus as he waits to be united with his bride the church forever and for eternity.

What a song to hear sung over us. By rights we deserve words of judgment and condemnation but by grace we hear this song of joy coming from our saviour God.

[26 : 32] Honestly we may struggle in ourselves to see it but we don't feel there is much to delight in about ourselves. Maybe we are very aware of the ugliness within. But this is wonderful truth from God's word.

Jesus in this sense is like the great master craftsman. He is like Michelangelo. You know the story of Michelangelo who was able to look at raw material just a big hunk of stone and to see a beautiful masterpiece and to get to work on shaping and creating with that joy in the work anticipating the masterpiece to be complete.

There is joy for Jesus now having saved us. There will be joy for Jesus when his work is complete and we're glorified when we are with him.

The Christian life is a life of song and it's learning to play these gospel songs in stereo. These melodies would help to give us confident faith and joyful hope and courage through troubles.

That song of the Savior's love love in action so we rest our hope in the Lord Jesus in his salvation both at the cross and the resurrection and in his return at the end to deal with evil and to establish his kingdom but also to hear that melody of a father's love for us of the Savior's loving heart towards us that we would let the Spirit speak that truth into our souls love for us to the great God and Savior loves us in Christ delight in us in Christ that Jesus can't wait to be united to his bride the church forever and so when we're trusting in Jesus just as Zephaniah says to us we can have joy as we think about the day of the Lord let's pray together Lord our

[28 : 55] God we thank you that it isn't just in the New Testament that we get these wonderful songs of the gospel and we thank you that you are the great Savior celebrated by your people through all time Old Testament New Testament and right up to the present Lord we thank you that you are the God who removes shame and replaces it with honor that you are the God who removes punishment and grants us peace that you are the God who through the Lord Jesus promises us that eternal and joyful homecoming Lord help us to believe the gospel help us to trust in what Jesus has done for ourselves we pray to to live knowing that you delight in your people that you don't just put up with us but that you take delight in us that Jesus longs for the day when all his people are with him forever in that world made new

Lord we pray as we look ahead to a new week that the gospel would fuel our sense of hope that you would give songs to our hearts and songs to our lips as we go through this coming week knowing that you are the saviour God who is with us with us always and we pray this in Jesus name amen now our closing hymn is the Lord is my salvation and again we'll stand as we sing the grace of God has reached for me and pulled me from the raging sea and I am safe on this solid ground the

Lord is my salvation I will not fear when darkness falls and strength will help me scale these walls I'll see the dawn of the rising sun the Lord is my salvation who is like the Lord our God strong to save faithful in love my debt is paid and the victory won the Lord is my salvation my hope is hidden in the

Lord He flies each promise of His word when winter fades I know spring will come the Lord is my salvation in times of waiting times of need when I know loss when I am weak I know His grace will renew these days the Lord is my salvation who is like the Lord our God strong to save faithful in love my debt is paid and the victory won the

Lord is my salvation and when I reach my final day He will not leave me in the grave but I will rise He will call me home the Lord is my salvation who is like the Lord our God strong to save faithful in love my debt is paid and their victory won the Lord is my salvation glory be to

[34 : 36] God the Father glory be to God the Son glory be to God the Spirit Lord is our salvation glory be to God the Father glory be to God the Son glory be to God the Spirit Lord is our salvation the Lord is our salvation the Lord is our salvation salvation the

Lord is our salvation the Lord is our salvation the Lord is our salvation we we we will close with some we will close with some more song people and language they cried out in a loud way salvation longs to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb amen praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever our God let us ■ on for guests and will

Thank you.