

Zephaniah 3

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[0 : 00] The book of Zephaniah, the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah. We have been spending a number of weeks in this little book.

This whole book is written as a poem or as a song. What we're going to do this evening is I'll read all of chapter 3 again, but then we'll focus on words from verse 11 to verse 15.

So Zephaniah chapter 3. Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled. She obeys no one. She accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord. She does not draw near to her God. Her officials are roaring lions. Her rulers are evening wolves who leave nothing for the morning. Her prophets are arrogant. They are treacherous men. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law. The Lord within her is righteous. He does no wrong.

[1 : 10] Morning by morning, he dispenses his justice. And every new day, he does not fail. Yet the unrighteous know no shame. I have cut off nations.

Their strongholds are demolished. I have left their streets deserted with no one passing through. Their cities are destroyed. No one will be left. No one at all.

I said to the city, Surely you will fear me and accept correction. Then her dwelling would not be cut off, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did. Therefore, wait for me, declares the Lord. For the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms, and to pour out my wrath on them, all my fierce anger.

The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger. Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord, and serve him shoulder to shoulder.

[2 : 13] From beyond the rivers of Cush, my worshippers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. On that day you will not be put to shame, for all the wrongs you have done to me. Because I will remove from this city, those who rejoice in their pride.

Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong.

They will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down, and no one will make them afraid. Sing, O daughter of Zion.

Shout aloud, O Israel. Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away your punishment. He has turned back your enemy.

The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you. Never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, Do not fear, O Zion. Do not let your hands hang limp.

[3 : 15] The Lord, your God, is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

The sorrows for the appointed feasts I will remove from you. They are a burden and a reproach to you. At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you.

I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. At that time I will gather you.

At that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes, says the Lord.

Amen. Once again at the book of Zephaniah. Zephaniah's closing words are about fortunes being restored.

[4 : 15] So what I want to think about this evening is the promise of God to the city of Jerusalem of a change in fortunes that would come for them because of the grace of God.

And to think how in the gospel of Jesus they were promised that same change of fortune. But let's begin here.

Let's begin with two cities under siege. The first one, Stalingrad in Russia during the Second World War. So in 1942, Stalingrad had already been under German attack for over a year.

So they were surrounded on all sides by the German army trying to make a march east. And the people within the city of Stalingrad, they were starving.

The bombs were falling regularly. This was a suffering people. But then in the summer of 1942, the conductor of the Stalingrad Orchestra decided that what was left of the orchestra that hadn't been killed and fighting to date would perform a new symphony composed by Shostakovich.

[5 : 36] And so this battered and starving city and musicians that could hardly draw enough puff to get their instruments working worked together for a number of months until the 9th of August when they were due to perform this new symphony.

So to make sure that there was peace for the performance, Russian planes flew over the city bombing the German areas around the city.

And so they were free as a city to listen to this new symphony. It was a hugely significant moment for them in their effort to endure.

For 18 months, they would still have to hang on until the Soviet army en masse would come and give them deliverance. But the city recognized in the music of Shostakovich and in the production of that symphony, that's a hard word to say, hope, the city endured because in part of this music that spoke courage into their bones.

There's another city under siege in Zephaniah 3. And that's Jerusalem, the city of God, under siege because of the judgment of God.

[7 : 12] That they had so often turned their back on God, turning towards other gods that God had sent the nations. He's promising He's going to send the nations to surround, to bring judgment on them.

So Jerusalem here in chapter 3 is a city under siege. And so the question then is, where will hope for this city come from?

That hope won't come from a symphony, but it will come from the song of the gospel. What we'll see this evening is that hope is promised, deliverance is promised from outside of themselves.

A hope that will make them sing because they are being reminded of the gospel of God with us. Every Christmas we remind ourselves of one of the titles of Jesus, that He is Emmanuel, God with us.

Well, that same promise is given to the city of Jerusalem. It's the same promise given to each one of us in the gospel, that in Jesus we can know God with us in our lives, even when we perhaps feel like we are under siege, under attack, experiencing all kinds of suffering.

[8 : 40] But before we get there, let's remind ourselves from the beginning of chapter 3, why is Jerusalem facing this promised judgment?

So quick recap, it's been a few weeks since we've been in Zephaniah. The day of the Lord is a major theme in this book. The day of the Lord, God's people presumed it would mean salvation for them, but they're being warned against complacency.

They're being told because of their rebellion, the day of the Lord will bring judgment. Judgment, chapter 1, judgment for Judah. And then in chapter 2, there's a break and they're told of judgment on the surrounding nations.

But then in chapter 3, focus returns to God's city, to Jerusalem, and they're told judgment will fall on them. The day of the Lord in the first eight verses will come as judgment.

So let's think about why that's the case. Look at the first two verses. There is an announcement of woe on this city for a number of reasons.

[9 : 43] We see them as lawbreakers. We see them as rebels. We see them as defiled and religiously unclean before God.

We see them in verse 2 as disobedient towards God, untrusting of God. We see them deliberately walking away from God instead of drawing near.

In verses 3 to 5, there is a contrast presented for us. In verse 5, we're introduced to the Lord within the city, the Lord with them, who is righteous, who performs in ways that are just and who seeks righteousness.

So you've got the righteous Lord, but then all around that, you have the unrighteous leaders of the people, whether that's the officials of verse 3, whether that's the prophets and the priests of verse 4, whether it's the religious or political and moral and social leaders, all of them are acting in ways that

are unrighteous.

That's why judgment will come. In verses 6 and 7, Zephaniah is sent to remind them of what God has been doing in the surrounding area.

[10:59] God has begun to bring about judgment on the surrounding nations. And that was intended to be a wake-up call.

Verse 7, I said to the city, surely you will fear me and accept correction, having cut off nations in verse 6. But they don't.

They don't hear those warnings. They don't respond to the judgment of God. They remain complacent. That they'll be okay because they're part of Israel.

So that in verse 8, they're told to wait for the Lord. God's judgment would come. God within the city will now be God against the city because of their rebellion.

What has Jerusalem got to do with you and me? Well, here in this book, we have God, the Creator King, saying, I am the Lord with you.

[12:09] And this same God who says, I am the Lord with you, is the same God who sends Jesus to be our Emmanuel. The same Jesus who is sent to be our suffering servant.

But just as the people in Zephaniah's day, so by nature, we say to God, we don't want you and we don't want your salvation.

We want to go our own way, make our own choices. That just as in Zephaniah's day, they are not alone in establishing idols for themselves.

placing someone or something higher than God in terms of significance and worship. All of us stand in covenant relationship with God, but all of us, because of our disobedience, have broken that covenant just as they did.

And in our daily decisions, just as in Zephaniah's day, all too often, we are rejecting God as king and as Lord because we would have that place instead.

[13:25] So one of the things that the Old Testament prophets do for us, and Zephaniah certainly does this for us, is it reminds us, they remind us of the heart of sin. They remind us of the sin in our human hearts.

J.C. Ryle, a Bible teacher from a previous generation said, a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity.

When we lose sight of our sin and rebellion against God, when sin is something that's treated as no big deal, when we look at ourselves as fundamentally good and right, and surely, just by virtue of being people, we're in a good relationship with God, then the message of the Bible, it doesn't come to us with any urgency.

The message that Jesus died for sinners makes no sense if we don't understand ourselves to be in that place. It was John Newton who famously sang about amazing grace, but we will only sing that from our hearts when we understand it saves a wretch like me.

And so, the message against Jerusalem is a message that we need to pay attention to because it reveals the sin that lies within.

[14:52] But then, the wonderful message of Zephaniah also speaks so much gospel hope to us. Remember that theme towards the end of chapter three of fortunes being restored.

Let's look together at how these images of transformation are brought from Zephaniah to this people standing under God's judgment.

First of all, shame will be removed. Look at verse 11. On that day, you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me.

For Jerusalem, they had done shameful things. Chapter one and chapter three are a catalogue of people who should have been following God's way, God's law, mistreating others and dishonoring God in false worship.

They had done shameful things and because of that, they have brought shame on themselves.

They have become unclean, defiled, as we're told in verse one.

[16:10] Sin had polluted them. There is this ugly stain on the city and there is no soap to deal with that disgrace that they possess in and of themselves.

So Zephaniah has been sent to show them their shame, to show how they have treated, how they have mistreated God, that they would feel the sense of that, the weight of that, but also then that they would see God's grace as good news.

When these city streets would be washed clean of shame, when their shameful past would be forgotten, when this God who they have dishonored would be willing to associate with them. Look at the end of verse 13, or verse 13, the remnant of Israel will do no wrong, they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths, they will eat and lie down, and no one will make them afraid.

That's a picture of God as their shepherd, God in the midst of them to care for them, willing to associate with those who will humble themselves, who will acknowledge their shame, and who will trust once again in the Lord, they will find this shepherd king who would honor them and who would care for them.

[17 : 56] And we see these values again in the coming of Jesus. This gospel of hope, this good news is brought by Jesus, that instead of shame, we can receive honor.

Perhaps we see it most strikingly in the conversation that Jesus has with a Samaritan woman in John chapter 4. This is a lady who lives with very public shame and disgrace because she has had five husbands and now she's living with somebody who she's not married to.

And in this religious society in which they live, this brought shame and disgrace on her. But Jesus comes and Jesus is willing to associate with her.

Jesus in love talks with her, offers himself as living water, lovingly shows her her sin and her shame so that he might bring healing.

Shame turns to honor when we encounter the Lord Jesus. And that's such a powerful truth of the gospel because shame can be such a heavy burden.

[19 : 18] Many psychologists would reckon that shame is actually a heavier thing to deal with than guilt in terms of its psychological damage.

Shame can crush us, leaving us feeling worthless, unclean, and dirty. mercy. But here in Jesus we can find hope.

Here through Jesus we can sing as those who have found honor to replace shame. Because Jesus will come into the world in order to bear our shame on the cross.

Jesus will take on himself the pollution of sin and he will be punished for that. He will bear the shame and disgrace so that we might not.

Jesus will face the shame of being mocked and rejected so that you and I can be welcomed. Jesus will pay the ultimate sacrifice giving his life for us so that we might know the honor of being children of God.

[20 : 42] In the gospel we discover that Jesus secures our honor before God because he identifies with us in our sin and our shame and he gives us a new identity so that we can live as children of God.

That Samaritan woman who had known such disgrace when she met Jesus as she went back to her village and she said come see a man who told me everything I ever did.

Could this be the Christ? Those awful things of her past that has served to condemn and crush now become pointers to the good news that Jesus offers to anyone that is hope beyond shame in knowing Jesus.

But there's more gospel hope, there's more transformation promised by God through Zephaniah here. There is the promise of punishment that will be removed.

Verse 14 and 15. Sing, O daughter of Zion, shout aloud, O Israel. Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem, the Lord has taken away your punishment.

[22 : 03] Here is a truth to make our hearts sing. The Lord, the personal covenant God, the God who has entered into a relationship with his people, who has always proved faithful to his people, offers hope to those who have been faithless to him.

there has been rebellion against the king, as we've seen all through Zephaniah. There has been spiritual adultery committed against God, the faithful husband, as we've seen through Zephaniah. Morally, we've seen that rebellion and unfaithfulness in their lies, in their corruption, in their exploitation, in their pride, in their greed.

Spiritually, we see it in their false worship, in their mixed worship, in their misplaced trust, and in their misplaced love.

And yet, although their sins are many, God's mercy is more. Maybe you know the parable, the story that Jesus told.

[23 : 22] He told the story once of a king who decided it was time to settle up with those who had got in debt with him. And one man was brought before the king, and he had a great mountain of debt that he could never pay off.

So he was unable to pay it, and the king said, well, because of that, you need to go to prison, you and your family. But then the man falls on his face and seeks mercy, and that king instantly forgives and cancels the debt.

Instead of punishment, mercy. How can anyone sing like Zephaniah calls the people of God to sing when they've just been told this catalog of sin and disobedience that means they are guilty before God?

Well, Zephaniah proclaims here that there is a taking away of punishment, but it's with the coming of Jesus that that proclamation is then explained to us.

How is this possible? Well, guilt is removed by sacrifice. It's the picture that we have in the Old Testament. But that was a pointer to the coming of Jesus.

[24 : 46] Jesus, who on the cross will become that perfect sacrifice to make atonement for the sins of his people, to take on himself the punishment that you and I deserve so that we might be free.

One of the things that Zephaniah shows us clearly and the Bible teaches us is that God is just. God must deal with sin in order for him to be holy and good.

He cannot simply turn a blind eye to sin. He cannot sweep sin under the rug. But God is also merciful and gracious. And he has provided a way of forgiveness through the sending of his own son, Jesus, to take sin and its penalty.

And because Jesus has fully satisfied God's justice against our sin, God can justly forgive those who will trust in Jesus.

So Jesus becomes God with us in order to be the Savior for us so that we can sing, so that we can sing of a punishment that's been removed.

[26 : 01] We can sing, no condemnation, now I dread, because Jesus and all in him is mine. One last picture of transformed fortunes.

Peace will be restored. Verse 15, the Lord has taken away your punishment. He has turned back your enemy.

So remember that picture, Jerusalem, the city under siege because of the judgment of God. Well, here is how it resolves. The Lord will act to deliver his people from their enemies.

The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you. Never again will you fear any harm. God is with his people now to fight for them and for their salvation.

We have this remarkable truth side by side that Jerusalem had chosen to become God's enemy, but God in his grace chooses to be a savior for his people.

[27 : 06] God chooses to show grace, grace that will bring them peace, grace that will reconcile them to God, grace that will turn enemies back into friends once again.

made me think of Jesus meeting with Saul on the Damascus road. Saul, who was an extremely religious man, but Saul who had decided that Jesus was not telling the truth about himself, that he wasn't the son of God, that Jesus and his church should be destroyed.

Well, Jesus comes and seeks out this enemy, the risen Lord Jesus comes to him and confronts him with his persecution of the church, converts him, brings him into God's kingdom and calls this enemy into service in this great act of reconciliation on the Damascus road.

And that's what God through Jesus does for anyone who puts their trust in him. Instead of us being at war with God, God establishes peace between us and our God.

So that instead of living with that fear of judgment, when we're trusting in Jesus, we can know his welcome. back in Stalingrad, decades after the siege had ended, survivors would still gather together in different pockets and they would listen to that piece of music from Shostakovich.

[28 : 59] And by then, it had been a reminder of how that hope that they had back in 42 had then become reality. So that music was a message for them of hope becoming victory.

In verse 14, we have the people of God called to sing. What do we sing? What do we need to sing? What we sing is how we talk to ourselves so often.

Our greatest need is to make this wonderful gospel the soundtrack to our lives. to sing, to remind ourselves of what Jesus has done for us.

That Jesus has come to turn our shame to honor. That Jesus has come to take our punishment so we might receive his reward. Jesus has come to end that warfare with God and to bring us peace

through his blood.

He has come to be God with us, to be that Savior for us so that we might sing. I wonder, does the song of the gospel give us joy?

[30 : 19] Does it give us peace? Does it help us to remember that honor that we have as the people of God? Jesus is to make a sense of sharing with rith Father and to be, to bevar thi is for the st to be