

God has a plan for good

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[0 : 00] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[5 : 00] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. That means the recording you're doing is starting right about now.

You could have waved at me and thrown stuff, but that's okay. Can you hear me better now? You didn't really need it, did you? But if we're going to record this, they need to do it. So, sorry about that.

Highly skilled and professional failure number 1013. All right. But if we get to verse 2. Verse 2 says, If I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but have not love, I'm nothing.

[6 : 57] That's really not putting it into practical terms. Check out verse 3 though. If I give away all I have, could you and I do that?

Could you and I give away all our possessions? I mean, we don't want to, but could we do it? Yeah, we could. All right. So we can identify with this one.

If I deliver my body up to be burned, I mean, could we do that? We could. Do we want to do that?

No. No. But we can identify with the idea of, you know, reaching out and doing something for other people to such an extreme.

But have not love, I am nothing. God is love. God is love. But what is love?

Love is not giving away everything. Love is not just self-sacrificing. There is more to what love actually is.

[8 : 05] It's not just all soft mushiness. The foundation of God's love is found in Psalms 97, verse 1 and 2.

Psalms 97, verse 1 and 2. The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice.

Let the many coastlands be glad. Clouds and thick darkness are all around Him. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

God is love. Do not be deceived. God absolutely is a loving God. But that very love is founded on two principles.

Well, it's undergirded by two principles. I wouldn't say that they are the cornerstone of God. What is the cornerstone of God's being? Anybody?

[9 : 18] Starts with an H and ends with Oli. God is holy. The holiness of God. But part of the foundational elements of who God is, is both righteousness and justice.

I'm sorry, but that's not soft, squishy, make you feel good stuff. It's not, love, love, love. It is absolute righteousness.

Empowered by justice. If I give away everything I have to the poor and make them feel better, but I don't have righteousness and justice in it, then I don't have love.

All right, I would love to just talk about love, love, love, but the reality is we've got to talk about other things too. So let's go back to Zephaniah. And there's a foundational truth that we need to establish before we go anywhere with Zephaniah.

As most prophecies, they have what's called a near and a far fulfillment. Okay? Prophecy doesn't always have a near far.

[10 : 34] The virgin shall have a child. That only happened with one girl, right? And that led to Jesus. There's not a near and far on that one. But a lot of the prophecies have both a really close to the prophetic giving fulfillment, but then they also have a greater implication down the road.

And that's true with Zephaniah, as with many prophecies. There was a near fulfillment, and there will be a long-range fulfillment to come.

Okay. As I was getting ready for today, I just, these are a couple of things I wanted to touch base with. And get us started with before we went into Zephaniah.

And I'll tell you why. If you turn to Zephaniah, chapter one.

I had a hard time getting through the first three verses of Zephaniah. Join with me, will you, as we read them?

[11 : 38] The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, son of Gildal, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah. In the days of Josiah, the son of Ammon, king of Judah.

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 wanted to go back to what I was going to do.

What? I'm sitting in my office and I'm reading this and I'm going, 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... I wanted to go back to what is love.

[12 : 39] Let's just talk about love. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. And I'll be honest with you. I read this day after day and I...

And I'm thinking Sunday's coming. And I get to tell people, thus saith the Lord. I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth. Praise Jesus, have a great week.

Put yourself in my shoes. Wouldn't it have been a lot easier just to look at you and say, Jesus loves you just the way you are. You're so special. God loves you.

In fact, Jesus came to the Lord just to save you because you're so special. Not, 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.

[13 : 43] Didn't hear a lot of amens on that one. What did we start with?

I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans for your welfare and not for evil. To give you a future and a hope.

I will sweep away all the rubble from the earth. Now, if you've been in church for a while, you probably went like this.

Put the seat belt on. I'm seeing where this is going. If you're new to church, you're like, what just happened? Okay. But let me tell you something. God has a plan. It's a good plan.

There's a plan. It's got hope in it. And it's got a lot of truth. Might not be simple. Might not be easy. God has a plan.

[14 : 43] Let's go through this. All right. A clean sweep. According to the prophecy that was given to Zephaniah, God is going to utterly sweep away everything.

Take a look down in verse 18 of chapter 1. Because it's not just in the beginning. He finishes chapter 1 with this.

It says, 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 will he make of all the inhabitants of the earth. Whoa. I mean, whoa.

But, but, but, but, but. He starts and ends with Judah. If you read through chapter 1 and through this short book, look with me at verse 12 here.

[15 : 54] Just pick this up in verse 4. 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 hosts of heaven. Those who bow down and swear to the Lord, yet swear by Milcom. I have no idea what Milcom is. I wonder if that's the inventor of almond milk.

I don't know. But we got this, we got this really harsh statement. Look at verse 12.

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps. And I will punish the men who are complacent. Those who say in the hearts, the Lord will not do good, nor will he do evil. Why pray? It's not like it has any power, right? It's not like God's going to do anything. Why follow him?

[17:02] God's not... I mean, when was the last time you saw the earth swallow somebody because they said something bad about God? God's... I mean, he's... He ain't doing nothing right now.

In that day, I will search Jerusalem. And this is... He's talking about Judah, his chosen people. Right? Then it goes on.

And in chapter 2, it details the destruction of all the surrounding nations. All right. So I've got this map. You've got it in your notes right there. So we're going to go through this real quick.

Chapter 2, verse 4. It says, It's talking about this area right down here.

Okay? Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza. It's the southern, western. Okay? Then it's verse... What is it? The next one is...

[18:17] Verse 5. O two, you inhabitants of the sea coast, you nations of the... Charites. The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines.

And I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left. And you, O sea coast... So it's talking about this area right here. Right? Sea coast.

Then where do we go to? Verse 8. I have heard the taunts of Moab and the revilings of the Ammonites and how they taunted my people.

He's talking about Moab and the Ammonites. That's the area to the east. And it goes on. And basically, this is what it says.

If you look up here to the map. Here is the kingdom of Judah. Chapter 1, hammers them. Chapter 2, hammers everybody else.

[19:18] That's basically, if you read it, that's what it says. God looks at Judah, his chosen people, and he says, I'm bringing it.

And then in chapter 3, he says, and everybody else is going to get some too. I am so glad I went to church today. It's been so encouraging.

I just feel built up. Which brings me to a real problem.

I've got a problem. And because of that, you've got a problem. And we together have a problem.

Anybody here read chapter 1, verse 2?

Anybody pay attention to that? How much is God going to destroy? All? Everything? Pretty much? Right?

[20:19] We've got a problem, people. Take a look at chapter 2, verse 9. Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Moab shall become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah.

Okay, what he's saying is, they're going to go away. They're going to be done, right? No problems there. The remnant of my people shall plunder them.

And the survivors of my nation shall possess them. Anybody see a problem there? Go ahead and raise your hand.

I see a really big problem. Because God says he's going to destroy how much? Everything.

Everything. But there's going to be a what? A remnant. Man, I'm glad I'm not the preacher.

I don't have to fix this. Right? Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay.

[21:32] Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Though God says he will sweep all away, there seems to be some that are not swept away.

Okay. I'm going to give you the best I can.

Okay? I don't have the answer. I don't have that answer. I have an answer. This is what I got.

You and I, we're going to pretend to be farmers. Some of us, that's a lot easier for than others,

right? But we're farmers. And we're going to go out and we're going to harvest our crop. And we're going to go get it all.

Right? What happens when you go out to harvest the whole crop? There's something left in the field. Now, maybe, maybe you have gotten the best pickers ever.

[22:47] And these people, I mean, they get every last possible fruit. Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam. And they get, they load it all into the bins. Then you got some moron that's driving the truck and it hits a bump.

What happens? Some of it spills out. Now, by Jewish law, under the law of Moses, could they harvest everything?

No, they had to leave something on the edges, didn't they? Am I saying this is exactly what is happening here? Dear Lord, no.

I'm just trying to point out a possibility. That sometimes a full and complete harvest leaves a little bit on the edge.

I'm not saying that's exactly what happened. I'm just saying that God allowed the people to harvest, but left a little bit on the edges. We also have the promise of God that there will always be a remnant.

[23 : 54] Golly, I'm glad that was perfectly clear. Okay? If you've got a better answer than I do, I would surely love to hear about it later. But I think in terms of a harvest, of a cleanup, of those sort of things, God's broom is going to go over the entire land.

Both Israel and the nations around Him. But that there will be a remnant left. It's the best I can do, people.

What about this remnant? Why would God, who is able to perfectly harvest everybody, why would He leave a remnant?

In the book of Joshua, chapter 24, verse 15, Joshua, who was a young man that came out of Egypt and served Moses, all of the wandering, was blessed by God to take over the mantle of leadership when Moses died, led the people into the promised land, and He led them to conquering all of the peoples.

And all of his life, he led the people earnestly and honestly to serve the Lord. But Joshua got old. And it came time for him to step down from his leadership.

[25 : 37] And one of the last things that he said before the people is this. And you can read it in Joshua. Choose you this day whom you will serve. And as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

And that's the choice that everybody faces. Who are you going to serve? And the thing is, when we choose to serve the Lord, when we choose to humble ourselves before Him and to live for Him, we enter into a special relationship with Him.

It doesn't mean that He's going to save us from all hardship in life. Can I get an amen on that? It doesn't mean that He's going to smooth all of our roads. But it does say that He has a plan for us. A plan for our good. And to give us hope. Two incredible passages of Scripture. James chapter 4 verse 10.

And 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 6. In the most inspired book of the Bible, said Pastor James, chapter 4 verse 10 says this, Humble yourself before the Lord and He will exalt you.

[26 : 56] In Peter chapter 5 verse 10. It says this, Humble yourself therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time He may exalt you.

Why is there a remnant when God says that He is going to utterly deal with it? It's possible that God is ultimately and totally harvesting only those who have failed to humble themselves before Him. It could be that God is select cutting all of the wicked out of the land. And the only people that will be left are those who have humbled themselves before Him.

That is a very real possibility. You see, the farmer goes out and he's going to pick everything and he's going to collect it all. And he's going to do the best. And some is going to be left behind.

And some of that's left behind is great. And some of it's not so great. And some of it he's glad he didn't harvest, right? But God, who's bringing the broom through, can take only the wicked and leave only the remnant.

[28 : 17] And I think that's what Zephaniah is talking about. But I want to talk about why God would do that. I really had a lot of fun writing this sermon.

I just want you to know. Because in all humility, I'm going to tell you what God's purpose is. I'm going to take my best stab at it, okay?

What is God's purpose? According to Zephaniah. Not taught. God's purpose is that the land, the entire world, would be filled with those who choose to serve and worship Him.

Look in Zephaniah 3, verses 9 through 13. At that time... See, remember we start with God sweeping everybody in chapter 1, describing who's going to get swept in chapter 1 and chapter 2. And here we pick up the reason why God's going to do it. Do you guys remember what happened back at the Tower of Babylon?

[29 : 43] Everybody went from speaking one language and God said, enough of that. You're not dispersing like I told you to. Let me give you a hand. You're going to speak English and you're going to speak German and you're going to speak Greek.

But there's going to come a day when God says, enough of that. It's time for us to come together. I will change the speech of all people 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 despised 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 seek the refuge in the name of the Lord.

[30 : 54] 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.

Choose you this day whom you will serve. Humble yourself, therefore, that in due time He may lift you up. God's purpose is that the land would be filled with people who honor Him, not themselves. And He has to sweep out the wicked so that people would honor Him and Him alone. You see, God cannot ignore evil.

You remember what the foundation of His throne comprises of? Righteousness and justice.

I've been having fun lately talking about the difference between expiation and propitiation.

Everybody's like, oh yeah, I know exactly what you're talking about.

[32 : 16] Jesus Christ came as our propitiation. You see, He satisfied God's wrath by dying a substitutionary death for our sins.

He is our propitiation. He paid our dues. You see, expiation is the idea that God looked at our sheet and He said, oh, don't worry about that sin.

It's good. You know, God doesn't do that. God doesn't paint over sin. God doesn't erase it. God doesn't ignore it. God deals with sin.

That's why Christ died on the cross. He paid what we owed because God's throne sets on both righteousness and justice.

He cannot and will not ignore sin. That's why we have to humbly come before Him. That's why we have to seek His salvation because He will not ignore it.

[33 : 33] And when we turn to Him, when we repent, when we ask for forgiveness, when we humble ourselves before God, this is what His plan is for us. There will be a day when God is going to sweep all of the wicked out.

Be gone. Bye-bye. And all that will be left are those who have humbled themselves before the Lord. And this is what His plan is. 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.

[34 : 40] He will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival so that you no longer suffer reproach.

Behold, at that time, I will deal with all of your oppressors. I will save the lame and gather the outcast. I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.

At that time, I will bring you in. At that 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.

God's purpose is that the world, the land, both inside Jerusalem and outside Jerusalem, will be filled with people who honor Him. People who, not perfect people, don't get me wrong, but redeemed people.

People who have humbled themselves before Him. Quite honestly, being a child of God is not always easy.

[35 : 57] There's no guarantee. There are hard days for everybody. But as a child of God, I am not worried about it.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I don't worry about cancer. I couldn't care less. Doctor comes at you with this big needle and says, I can prolong your life.

Get away from me. I'm going to glory. Right? Do what I tell you or else. Or else what?

You want to know the only thing that I fear? Standing before Him and not hearing well done. That is the only thing I fear. Why?

Because I trust the Word of God. Choose you this day whom you will serve. As for me, I serve the Lord.

[37 : 01] Not because I'm great. Oh! But because I desperately need Him. Those of you who know me for a while know, yeah, you really need the Lord, buddy.

Good luck. And I don't even have to know you to tell you, you need the Lord too. Because on our own, we don't stand a chance.

On our own, the broom will catch us. It is only by humbling ourselves before the Lord that we get to enjoy the promise of His salvation and Him lifting us up.

Let's pray.