

# Why Jesus Matters: The Love of God

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Date: 28 March 2010

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please have a seat. How does a preacher come after a donkey? I don't know. I'll try.

It would be good to have your Bibles open at a passage read earlier for us, Zephaniah chapter 3, page 767. Now our world is obsessed with scandals.

A few weeks ago there was a natural disaster in a part of the world where there's already been a natural disaster this year and the first item on the 6 o'clock news was about the breakup of Michael Clarke and Lara Bingle.

There was this great loss of life somewhere in the world but apparently we are more concerned with scandals. Our world is obsessed with scandals. It's all over the media. It's all that people talk about. They love scandals. Well, Christianity is a scandal. It is a shocking scandal. And over the last few weeks we've been looking at the book of Zephaniah in the Old Testament.

[ 1 : 13 ] We have been learning from Zephaniah and we're in the tail end of it really, the second half of chapter 3 which we'll look at. And we're going to look at God's word and see what is so scandalous and shocking about Christianity.

So pick up your Bible and pick it up with me just to give us an idea of where we have come from in this series so far in this book of Zephaniah.

Where have we come? Well, I'll pick it up in verse 8, chapter 3. Now that is a good summary of where we have come from in Zephaniah.

In chapters 1 and 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, God has declared he will pour out his judgment on the world, on the nations surrounding Israel and on also the southern kingdom of Judah.

God has promised a day when he will judge the world. But let's notice in this section that there's a bit of a gear crunch. See if you can pick it up. Verse 9.

[ 2 : 30 ] At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord.

Or more literally, serve him shoulder to shoulder or side by side. Here God promises to preserve a remnant. There's a completely different tone to this verse, isn't it?

To the one before. He says at the end of verse 8, all of the earth will be consumed and then I will change the speech of the peoples. All of them will call on the name of the Lord and serve him.

It's completely different, isn't it? God is preserving a remnant. God will spare a people for himself. So the day of judgment will be a day of purification.

The way that gold or precious metal is thrown into the fire to burn off the dusty bits and the dirty bits. God will burn everything and as a result bring out the genuine gold.

[ 3 : 31 ] This isn't just for Judah though. Look at verse 10. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, my scattered ones, shall bring my offering.

Notice that from beyond Ethiopia. This is non-Jews bringing offerings of worship to the God of Israel. This is bigger than Judah.

This is people of all nations coming to worship the God of Israel. And he says, verse 11, That is, God is going to remove or expel proud people who trust in themselves for salvation, not God alone.

He says, you'll no longer be haughty or proud on my holy hill. That is the temple mountain in Jerusalem. He says, verse 12, I will leave in the midst of you a people, humble and lowly.

Notice the difference between verse 12 and verse 11. He says, in verse 11, I will remove from your midst. In verse 12, I will leave in your midst. He says, a people humble and lowly.

[ 4 : 51 ] They shall seek refuge, that is, protection or safety, in the name of the Lord, the remnant of Israel. We saw earlier in chapter 2, God mentioned this remnant or remainder of people on the day of judgment.

But he didn't go into much detail. Well, he says here who those people are, those who take refuge in the name of the Lord or who trust God for their salvation.

Now, God is going to burn the world and only a remnant will be spared. Who are they? Those who trust in God alone for salvation.

He says, verse 13, they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down and no one shall make them afraid.

Unlike the people of Judah, corrupt, deceitful, practicing all kinds of idolatry and paganism, this remnant, this group of people who are purified by God on the day of judgment are different.

[ 6 : 03 ] They do no wrong. They do not lie. They have nothing to fear because there's no longer any crime. There's no longer any evil. There's no police force out on the streets catching the bad guys because they're not there.

On the day of judgment, sin and evil and all who share in it have been taken away. What's left is the purified people of God.

And like the good news of the announcement of a birth or a wedding or an engagement, there's really big, really exciting, really wonderful news. Verse 14, Sing aloud, O daughter Zion.

Shout, O Israel. Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem. Why? Verse 15, The Lord has taken away the judgments against you.

He has turned away your enemies. He says, The King of Israel. Now, who's the King of Israel? Listen to this. It's the Lord.

[ 7 : 06 ] The King of Israel. The Lord is in your midst. He doesn't say David. He doesn't say Solomon. He doesn't even say King Josiah, who was a good king, who's reigning while Zephaniah is making this prophecy.

No, no. The King of Israel is God himself. And he says, Because God is with you, because God is the King of Israel, you shall fear no disaster anymore.

Now, Mike Tyson is a famous boxer. He's an ex-boxer now, but he was a famous boxer. He's a big guy, a lot taller than me, several feet wider.

He can really hurt someone in a boxing ring. I'm sure you'd agree that Mike Tyson doesn't need my protection. When he goes out into the streets, he has nothing to fear.

And if I were to step into a ring against Mike Tyson, there better be an ambulance and a priest on standby, because I'm not coming out of that ring alive. Against Mike Tyson, I don't stand a chance.

[ 8 : 11 ] But if Mike Tyson were to offer to be my bodyguard, I would feel very, very safe. I'd be happy to walk down the worst streets of Melbourne, late at night, with nothing to fear, because Mike Tyson is with me.

You see the point? Now, God is not like Mike Tyson in that God is much, much bigger, God is much, much more powerful, and God is much, much better than Mike Tyson.

But do you get the point? God is with you, not against you anymore. So don't be afraid. Verse 16, Do not fear, O Zion. Do not let your hands grow weak.

Or as we would say, your teeth chatter when you're afraid, or your knees get wobbly. It's another way of saying don't be afraid. The Lord your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory.

And what is this warrior going to do? Look at verse 17, the second half. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will renew you in his love. He will exalt over you with loud singing, as on a day of festival.

[ 9 : 19 ] Now, these verses are amazing. This is the exact opposite of everything we've heard so far in Zephaniah. In chapters 1 and 2, there were battle cries.

There was screaming and bloodshed. There was a day of darkness. It was just this creepy, horrible picture of war and judgment. Now, God is pouring out his love and his kindness and forgiveness and mercy.

There's delight and singing and love. It's like a parent cradling a baby in their arms, lovingly, protectingly. It's like a groom with his new bride.

He's just smitten. This is God demonstrating great, kind, patient, merciful love. Verse 18, he says, I will remove disaster from you, so you will not bear reproach for it.

I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. I will save the lame and gather the outcasts, that is, those who have been exiled to Babylon. He says, I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.

[10:28] That is amazing. God is going to take the disgrace of their exile and flip it on its head and make them praised and renowned in all the earth.

And verse 20, now this is the jackpot. At that time, I will bring you home. Now, think of reading these words after Judah's exiled.

Imagine being a Jew in the 6th century, reading these words. You've been exiled to Babylon. Your place of worship has been desecrated. Your family's been separated.

Your house is burnt down. You're living under this pagan regime. Imagine that's you. And then read these words. Listen to these words. In verse 20, At that time, I will bring you home.

At that time, when I gather you, for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes, says the Lord.

[11:27] Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that amazing? Isn't God's forgiveness and love and mercy and his promises just amazing? Everything so far in Zephaniah has just been scathing judgment.

People at the door on the way out after the services have been asking me, you know, Zephaniah's kind of all doom and gloom, isn't he? When does it get better? Is there any good news in this? I've been telling you to wait for it.

And here it is. Zephaniah is a prophet of grace. Judgment, yes, but also grace. Amazing grace. Because God's people have done nothing to earn this reward.

God's people have done everything to deserve his judgment and condemnation. But here, God promises hope, forgiveness, return to glory.

He says, I'll restore your fortunes before your very eyes. Now, it didn't happen in the 6th century because the Jewish people have been taken over by lots of people groups throughout history.

[12:31] It didn't happen in the 1st century at the time of Jesus either because the Jews were still living under the pagan Roman rule. Zephaniah is actually pointing us beyond 6th century, 1st century, beyond even today.

He's pointing to the future, to the day of judgment as this day. The day of wrath we've heard about earlier where every rebel is held accountable to God and punished for their sins.

It's also the day of amazing grace and mercy where undeserving sinners who trust God alone are spared and they're brought into his everlasting kingdom.

This is just a scandal. This is shocking. God is the just and perfect judge and he's giving people a get out of jail free card. It's a scandal.

How can God be this forgiving and merciful? How can God be both a perfect judge and a merciful forgiving saviour? How can he do that without compromising who he is?

[13:36] If he just sweeps our sins under the rug he's not being just. But if he gives us what we deserve we all face death and judgment. So, how can God be both?

How can God do both? The answer is in the death of his son Jesus. The death of Jesus is God's pledge to be the God of perfect justice and the God of forgiving love.

The Bible says throughout the Bible God so loved the world that he gave his only son. God demonstrates his love for us in this while we were sinners Christ died for us.

The Apostle Peter says Christ died the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God. God's mercy and his kindness and forgiveness in the death of Jesus is a shocking scandal because it's a free gift.

We can't do anything to pay God back for it. We can't we definitely don't deserve it. We can't earn it in any way. It is a free gift. In Jesus' death on the cross God acts justly and he condemns our sins.

[14:50] In the death of Jesus God also he shows his love sacrificial love. He pays the penalty for us. Now God's love is totally different from the world's picture of love.

The world's picture of love is all about selfish gain. What do I get from a relationship with someone? What do I get out of it? That's the world's view of love.

God's love is selfless and sacrificial. It costs God everything to forgive us. In the world's view of love it's all about warm fuzzy feelings and experiences.

Well God's love is not like that. God's love is God enters human history in the man Jesus. He incarnates. He enters our world. He becomes a man.

His love is tangible and it's objective and it's something physical and it's demonstrated to us. It's not about warm fuzzy feelings. The world's view of love is that we love those who love us back.

[15:54] God's love is that he loves his enemies. those who don't love him and reject him. God loves his enemies. The death of Jesus is God's pledge to be the perfect God of justice and the God

of love and forgiveness.

Zephaniah is pointing us forward to, it's anticipating, it's making us long for Jesus to come and die. Now I meet so many Christians who doubt God's love.

I meet so many Christians who carry around kind of a burden of remembering past sins that they haven't really dealt with and just on a day-to-day basis, the daily grind of the Christian life, so many Christians carry around burdens and guilt of not measuring up to God's standards.

One of the things about particularly depressed, introverted, introspective people is that they carry around like this mirror that they're always looking at their own performance and seeing life sort of measured by themselves or through themselves.

They know they don't measure up to God's standards so they carry around this kind of guilt and depression and doubt about that God is even really there. And the message of Jesus is to look outside of yourself and look at Christ, look at his perfect life, look at the perfect life he lived, look at the death he died, look at Christ to know that God loves you.

[ 17 : 36 ] Now there are days when I doubt God's love, either I am aware of past sins and I think how can God forgive me or I do something dumb and I think how could God love me today when I've done X, Y or Z.

What I need to do is look at Christ, Christ died in my place for my sins as my substitute, he's left nothing undone, it's all been done for in the death of Jesus, he's done everything on the cross for me, all my sins have been done away with and all my righteousness is provided for in the death of Jesus, I simply need to trust him, stop looking at the mirror on myself and look at Jesus, point the mirror to Jesus and look at him, so no matter, independent of how I feel or what the circumstances might be, I can say with all confidence, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. John Newton is a famous 18th century, was an 18th century slave trader, he dealt in the trafficking of Afro-American slaves, he became a Christian, he quit the profession of slave trading and fought for the abolition of slavery and he's the famous guy who wrote to him Amazing Grace.

in his 80s, when he was much later on in life, he said this quote, my memory is going but I remember these two things, I am a great sinner and Christ is a great saviour and that has, as we look over Zephaniah we have seen God's pledge to be a perfect judge but to be a forgiving saviour and so we can thank him and praise him and look to him for mercy and forgiveness on the last day and even now.

We can know him and love him and trust him and this future that he promises can be ours and knowing him and trusting him, being with him in his kingdom.

[ 19 : 48 ] So let's pray and thank God for his mercy in Christ. Gracious God and Father, thank you for sending Jesus to die for us. Thank you that he rose again from the dead and all we need to do is to trust you.

Father, please help us from ever looking at ourselves and relying on our own performance with you, particularly those people who are depressed and who are worried about where they stand with you, who never feel good enough measuring up to your standards.

Father, please help them to know the death of Jesus and to embrace the death of Jesus for their forgiveness, that there might be no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because the condemnation we deserve has already been paid for.

God, our Father, thank you for the great gift of Jesus. Please help us to keep knowing and loving and trusting him. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.