

Salvation for a Remnant

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Date: 23 January 2011

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. You might like to open your Bibles again, please, to Zephaniah chapter 3, which is page 766.

And you should have received an outline as you came in that will help you follow along or take notes if you take notes. I know some children are very obsessive-compulsive with their smarties. I think one of my children is, but personally I just stuff them all down my throat and eat them at once. So I don't know if I'd have a remnant of smarties left, but that's just me. Well, let's pray that God would help us to understand his word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for Zephaniah. We pray that you would help us again this morning to understand what we've read and that you would work in us by your spirit, that we would take to heart your word and believe it, that you would encourage us this morning and help us to obey you.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, why did Jesus come to earth? One very prominent, well-known Christian organisation, I won't name them, but they said that Jesus came to earth for the love of a princess.

[1 : 16] Jesus came to earth for the love of a princess. This organisation was advertising its major annual women's conference, and it's in Sydney, and there was a big banner, banners that they put up for all people to see, and it said, God believes in you, princess, and so do we.

God believes in you, princess. Did God send Jesus to earth because he thinks you're a princess, or maybe if you're a bloke, a prince, and because he believes in you?

Does God believe in you? Does God look at you and see a prince or a princess? Does he think you're wonderful, that you're awesome?

Is that why he sent Jesus? Well, as with all heresies, there's always actually some truth in them, and we'll see that before we finish this morning. But I think what this organisation was saying is actually very wrong.

Jesus came to earth not because he thinks we're wonderful or a prince or a princess, but because we're sinners. When Jesus looks at you or me, he doesn't see a prince or a princess, but sees a sinner in desperate need of salvation.

[2 : 35] And it's not so much, of course, that God believes in us. I'm not sure that's the case at all, but that we're to believe in God who saves us.

Jesus came to earth to save sinners. And we've seen in the last couple of weeks in Zephaniah that sin is indeed very bad, that God will pour out his wrath on the world one day because of our sin, and he doesn't look at us and believe in us because we're a prince or princess.

Zephaniah, though, as we've seen, has talked about how we can deal with this problem of sin. God deals with it for us, and we're to repent, to seek God and to humble ourselves before him, we saw last week in chapter 2.

And last week in chapter 2, it talked about a remnant of humanity, that those who seek God and humble themselves before him will be spared God's judgment to come because Jesus has died in our place and taken the punishment for our sin on himself.

And so those who trust in Jesus will be spared God's wrath to come. And that's great news. And the great news is not that God believes in you or that you're a princess or prince.

[3 : 51] The great news is that in face of judgment that you and I deserve, that it's been placed on Jesus and you and I will be forgiven if we trust him. So I think it's right that a couple of people have said to me in the last two weeks, it's good to hear about judgment.

It's actually a good thing and it's a positive thing. And indeed it is. And you don't understand how great salvation is until you understand sin and judgment first.

And so today's passage again is going to talk about judgment. We'll speak again about the remnant spared from God's judgment. But it's very positive as well as Graeme said and we'll look at rejoicing in our salvation.

So let's have a look at this together, Zephaniah chapter 3. We finished chapter 2 last week looking at judgment on the nations and chapter 2 finished with judgment on the Assyrians, on the wicked city of Nineveh.

And in the original there's no headings like we have or chapter divisions. And as Zephaniah would have just spoken on into chapter 3, you would have thought that he's still speaking about this wicked city of Nineveh.

[4 : 58] For he starts in chapter 3 verse 1, he says, Ah, soiled, defiled, oppressing city. The word ah there, the first word is often translated woe.

God is saying woe to this wicked city. It's soiled, which other translations give us rebellious. It's a rebellious city.

It's defiled or polluted morally. It's oppressing of others. It's a rebellious, wicked city. And those listening to Zephaniah might have been nodding their heads and saying, Yes, those horrible Assyrians, that wicked city of Nineveh, they really deserve God's judgment.

But it's a bit like Amos chapter 1, because as you go on into chapter 3, you realise that he's actually speaking about Jerusalem and that the listeners are looking at themselves in a mirror.

In verse 2, Zephaniah says, This city has listened to no voice. It has accepted no correction. It has not trusted in the Lord. It has not drawn near to its God.

[6 : 02] He's saying the people of Jerusalem wouldn't repent. They had this great privilege of hearing the very words of God, but they would not listen to God's voice. God sent sufferings and disasters their way to discipline them, but they would not accept his correction.

And the heart of the problem really is that third line of verse 2, they would not trust in God. They wouldn't draw near to him. And so instead of repenting, they refused to believe him.

They refused to trust in God. In the same vein, verses 3 and 4 talk about the wickedness of the leaders of Jerusalem.

In verse 3, it speaks about the civic leaders, the officials and judges, who are like roaring lions and evening wolves, who devour and oppress the poor and the helpless and leave nothing.

In verse 5, it speaks about the religious leaders, the prophets and the priests. The prophets are described as reckless and faithless. They're false prophets, who speak, I presume, from the imaginations of their own hearts and minds, rather than speaking the word of God.

[7 : 09] And the priests do the opposite of what they should have done. They profane what is holy or sacred. They do violence to God's word, to his law. It's a disaster always when the leaders of God's people speak from the imaginations of their own minds and hearts instead of teaching the word of God, or who refuse to live by God's word.

And in the Anglican Church, I hope you would realise, there are many leaders in the Anglican Church who are like this. There are leaders who deny that Jesus rose from the dead, who deny that Jesus died in our place and paid for our sins, or who refuse to live God's way according to the Bible. It should make us thankful, of course, that there are good leaders in the Anglican Church who are not like that and who do teach and live by God's word. And we should be praying, of course, then as well, for our ministers, that they would believe the word of God and live by it.

By contrast to these wicked leaders, though, in verse 5 is God. The Lord is within Jerusalem and unlike the wicked leaders, he is righteous and he does no wrong.

God is perfect in holiness and righteousness. And while the leaders bring injustice and no, no shame, end of verse 5, God instead every morning renders his justice without fail.

[8 : 31] In the last bit of this first section, in verses 6 to 8, there's a bit of a change there where God now speaks in the first person. The word I, you'll see there, is repeated over and over.

And in verse 6, God speaks about his judgment on the nations. In chapter 2, he said how he will judge the nations, but here he says, there have been cases in the past as well where he's judged the nations.

Verse 6, he's cut off nations, he's laid waste their streets, he's made desolate their cities. And he thought, verse 7, that this would make his own people in Jerusalem wake up and take notice of his judgment.

Surely they would fear him, he says in verse 7, and accept correction. But they refuse to repent and end of verse 7, they're all the more eager to become wicked and corrupt.

The punchline then comes in verse 8, it really should be with verses 1 to 7, the ASV gets that right. And verse 8 says, therefore, wait for me, says the Lord, for the day when I arise as a witness, for my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all the heat of my anger, for in the fire of my passion all the earth shall be consumed.

[9:46] God says here, he will judge all the world, as he said in chapter 1, but this time it will include God's people, Judah and Jerusalem, as we also saw in chapter 1.

So again, we're seeing that God is angry with sin, he will judge all the world, including his people, he will judge all nations, in the heat of his anger all the earth will be consumed.

But there is good news, as well as the bad news of judgment, and the good news as we saw last week is that a remnant will be spared God's judgment. In chapter 2 we saw a remnant not only from Israel but from all nations will be restored after God's judgment and that's the same here in this second section in verses 9 to 13 and in fact it starts with the remnant of the nations in verses 9 and 10.

Verse 9 says, 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. At that time God says he will purify the lips of the nations so that they can call on him so that they can worship God.

They'll worship him they'll serve him together with one accord. It's saying that God will grant a remnant of the nations forgiveness of sins as they repent and turn to him.

[11:07] And verse 10 they'll come from afar from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia to pray to God that's what his supplianc means and to worship him to bring his offerings so here is a remnant of the nations who are spared God's judgment and will worship God.

They'll join with God's people Israel in the worship of God. Verses 11 to 13 then speak about this remnant from Israel. On that day verse 11 says there will be people in Israel who will not be put to shame for their sins.

They may be sinful but they'll be forgiven their sins. And God verse 11 will remove from their midst those who are wicked the proudly exultant ones. Those who are not humble but proud will be removed.

Those who are exultant which was the word used of the Assyrians at the end of chapter 2 they will be removed. And those who are left verse 12 God will leave in the midst of them a people humble who seek God who seek refuge in his name.

Again that's like the beginning of chapter 2 those who seek God who humble themselves before him they are the remnant verse 13 says the remnant of Israel the proud and arrogant will be removed the humble and those who seek God will be saved.

[12:23] And the description of this remnant is quite amazing in verse 13 it says they shall do no wrong and utter no lies nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths.

Verse 5 said of God that he does no wrong and here the remnant are like God they do no wrong. They are perfect in holiness and righteousness and they speak only the truth.

And then verse 13 they will pasture and lie down and no one shall make them afraid. That's a description I think of heaven perfect peace eternal rest those who trust in God will lie down and no one will make them afraid.

Verses 1 to 13 of chapter 3 are really just making more clear what we've already seen in the last two weeks if you've been here in chapters 1 and 2. It's saying that the people of Judah as a whole have indeed been wicked rebellious defiled refused to listen to God refused to repent they're proud they're arrogant they won't seek God in repentance or humble themselves before him and therefore God will judge them he will bring his judgment on all the nations and they will be judged as well. his judgment will remove the wicked and those who are left will be those who are humble and lowly and who seek God and they will come from Israel and from the nations and as one new people will worship God in perfect righteousness and holiness and have eternal peace and rest.

[14:01] Now Zephaniah is writing this a long time ago of course 7th century BC and he's straining ahead to make clear what he's seeing of God's final judgment and salvation but we of course as Christians now know even more than Zephaniah did for we know that Jesus came and took on himself God's judgment that you and I deserve so that we will be spared God's judgment when it comes those who seek God who humble themselves before him those who trust in Jesus will be spared God's judgment when it comes we're not yet of course perfect in holiness and righteousness

you may be all too well aware of that I certainly am we may not yet we certainly don't have perfect rest and peace but we will have those things when Jesus returns and what we do have now is that as one people Jew and Gentile we worship God together and wait for the return of Jesus and that eternal peace and rest in the last couple of weeks as we've looked at chapters 1 and 2

I've asked how should we live then in light of this certain coming judgment of God how do we live and I've urged us to live now in light of God's coming judgment to know that it's coming to take God seriously now to seek him as Zephaniah says and humble ourselves before him but verses 14 to 20 our third section finishes on a very positive note as well not only do we seek God and humble ourselves before him living in light of God's coming judgment but we can also rejoice in the coming salvation of God those who trust God will be spared his judgment and we should rejoice in God's coming salvation and so verse 14 Zephaniah says four commands there sing shout rejoice exult with all your heart we're told to rejoice in God's salvation and it is great news

God's salvation we do deserve God's judgment but Jesus has taken it we've forgiven our sins we have full assurance of eternal peace and rest that should make you and I rejoice in God's salvation verse 15 says the Lord has taken away from us the judgments against us the punishments that we should receive have been paid in full and removed by Jesus death on the cross verse 15 he's turned away our enemies no longer will we face sin death hell the devil they've all been defeated by Jesus death on the cross verse 15 the king of Israel the Lord is in your midst God is with us he's with us by his Holy Spirit and we'll see him face to face and at the end of verse 15 we will fear disaster or evil never again no more on that day verse 16 it will be said do not fear do not let your hands hang limp because on the day of judgment if we trust in

Jesus you and I will be spared God's wrath sin death the devil will be no more we will see God face to face and so we can rejoice in God's salvation not just then but now in fact Christians will rejoice in God's salvation both in good times and in bad even when everything goes wrong when we suffer when there's disaster in fact if we lost everything you could still rejoice in God's salvation because nothing can take away from you the fact that Jesus has died and paid for your sins nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord you can always rejoice in God's salvation sing aloud oh daughter Zion shout oh Israel rejoice and exult with all your heart oh daughter Jerusalem there are times when we should focus on our sins but at all times we should focus not so much on our sin our weakness our failure but on

Jesus death in our place and rejoice in God's salvation we come now to verse 17 and one commentator has said this is the John 3 16 of the Old Testament they might not have thought you'd find that in Zephaniah but you might agree with him at the end of looking at this verse it's a great verse verse 17 let's read it again the Lord your God is in your midst a warrior who gives victory he will rejoice over you with gladness he will renew you in his love he will exult over you with loud singing the first line there that God is in our midst repeats what he already said in verse 15 that God is with us that he brings us victory which we see in the death of Jesus the last three lines of verse 17 are like a little poem and they repeat you might see the words of verse 14 where we are told to rejoice in God's salvation and sing here God rejoices and sings but what's absolutely amazing is he rejoices and sings over you now I should say to be fair that the word you there is actually in the feminine in the

[19 : 45] Hebrew and refers to Jerusalem so Jerusalem is what's being talked about all the way through this chapter and this is saying God rejoices and sings over you Jerusalem but if you trust in Jesus you're one of God's people and that's what Jerusalem here means it stands for God's people and so it is true if you trust in Jesus that God rejoices over you with gladness it's like Luke 15 where there's joy in heaven Jesus says over one sinner who repents God rejoices over you with gladness exalts over you with loud singing the second line of that little poem in verse 17 says he will renew you in his love and I'm afraid I don't think that's right you'll see there's a footnote and the footnote in NRSV says that that's following the Greek and I don't know why the NRSV always seems to do that but the Hebrew which is correct actually says he will be silent in his love maybe they thought that

God can't rejoice and exult over you with singing and be silent in his love but of course he can do both at least at different times and this is saying basically that the idea is God not only rejoices and sings over you but he quietly contemplates you in his love he thinks about you which is amazing one commentator says I want to quote him here to consider almighty God sinking in contemplations of love over a once wretched human being can hardly be absorbed by the human mind it's actually saying in verse 17 God looks at you and thinks you are fantastic awesome incredible is that

beginning to sound now like the introduction where I wrote off that well known group I didn't mention for saying that you're a princess that

God sent Jesus to earth because he believes in you his princess is it like that actually I think it's not I think that is a false teaching which has some amazing half truths which come out in verse 17 God sent Jesus to earth because you are a sinner in need of salvation that's what we've seen you're actually not a princess or a prince if you're a bloke but this chapter itself is saying we were rebellious defiled oppressing not listening to God not accepting correction not trusting in the Lord but Jesus has died and paid for your sins if you trust in God if you trust in Jesus you're a child of God you're a new creation the old is gone the new has come and when God looks at you he sees what Jesus has done in his death on the cross when God looks at you he sees his work that has been achieved by Jesus death that God has made you a new creation that he rejoices over you then in his love contemplates you in his love and exalts over you with great singing not because of something within you or me but because of what

Jesus has done for us God sees what we are in Christ and he loves his work and he rejoices and exalts over you do you know how much God loves you because of what Jesus has done for you it's an amazing verse well let's finish briefly then with verses 19 and 20 the end of Zephaniah they're parallel verses God says verse 19 I will deal with all your oppressors at that time and I will save the lame and gather the outcast and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth at that time I will bring you home at the time when I gather you for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples off the earth when I restore your fortunes before your eyes says the Lord here in these verses God's speaking again about restoring his people after judgment gathering them and bringing them home the immediate resolution resolution of that verse outcome of that verse was bringing the exiles back from

Babylon to the promised land but ultimately it's bringing us home into the new heavens and the new earth one day we will be perfect and righteous in eternal peace and rest and he says at the end of verse 20 those who are listening to him in the seventh century BC will see that with their own eyes because they'll be raised from the dead and together with us will be brought home to the new heavens and the new earth where instead of shame we will have praise and renown honour and fame it's a great ending verses 14 to 20 of this little book of Zephaniah you had to endure that unrelenting judgment all the way through chapters 1 and 2 but it shows you how important then the theme of judgment is that we need to hear judgment in order to really appreciate how great God's love is and his salvation offers do you remember where the hallelujah chorus comes from if you remember it's from revelation chapter 19 the famous hallelujah chorus we're at the height of God's final judgment on earth there's this great outburst of praise and rejoicing from

[25 : 34] God's people in all of heaven in God's judgments and salvation what we've seen in Zephaniah is that God's judgment is certain and that we do need to seek God again and again in repentance and humble ourselves before him to live now in light of God's coming judgment but we've also been reminded that Jesus has died in our place taken that judgment on himself that we deserve so that we'll be spared God's judgment we will be in the new heavens and the new earth in eternal peace and rest we'll have honor and fame instead of shame we'll be without sin in perfect righteousness and holiness where there will be no more fear where we will see God face to face where we will rejoice in God and more incredibly God will rejoice in us so rejoice sing exalt in

God and more amazingly he rejoices over you in gladness contemplates over you in his love and exalts over you with loud singing rejoice in the Lord always I will say it again rejoice not only do we seek God and humble ourselves because of his judgment but we want to rejoice in God's great salvation and I thought a good way to finish then would be to sing now so we're going to sing together and rejoice in God with a great hymn rejoice the Lord is King let's stand