

A Day of Judgement

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[0 : 00] Well, please do turn back to Zephaniah, which is page 942. Well, there are all sorts of warning signs in life from the ones you wouldn't think are necessary.

So, for example, this kid's costume has a warning on the website. This costume does not enable flight or super strength. Do they need that warning? I don't know.

To some other warnings which make no sense at all. Here's some tablets to help you sleep, sleeping tablets. And the bottom right-hand side of this is the warning. Warning, these pills may make you sleepy.

What? I hope so. That's why you're buying them, right? To put perhaps more serious warnings like this one that says, Danger, not only will this kill you, it will hurt the whole time you are dying.

But there are actually even more serious warnings than that. Like this one, Zephaniah. And that's what his book is about.

[1 : 05] It's one big warning to his people. It does have hope, but today it's all about judgment, mostly. But let me start with some background.

And because I need to give you a bit of background, this sermon is going to be a bit longer than the next ones. So please bear with me. But verse 1, it starts there in verse 1. So the word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah, son of Cushy, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah, son of Ammon, king of Judah.

Now, no other prophet is given a genealogy this long, probably here because Zephaniah is related to the good king Hezekiah. And perhaps the writer puts that in to give his word more credibility.

You know, it's connected to a king, that the people might actually heed his warning. Of course, all they should have needed are the first five words of verse 1.

First five words, the word of the Lord. Isn't that enough reason to listen? But we're also told that Zephaniah spoke God's word during the reign of King Josiah, who was also a good king of Judah.

[2 : 22] But if he was a good king, why was there any need for Zephaniah to prophesy? Well, Hezekiah's other son was Manasseh.

And he did unprecedented evil in Judah. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord. He built altars in God's very temple.

I don't think we quite understand how offensive that is. And so to try and put it in some modern day analogy, it would be like a spouse having an affair in their marriage bed with the other spouse looking on in front of them.

I mean, that's really offensive, isn't it? But that's what it would have been like, building altars to other gods in the temple of God, in front of God. It's horrific.

And of course, we also find horrific, and it is, that he sacrificed his own son in the fire. And so at the end where it says he did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, well, that's an understatement.

[3 : 28] And his rule lasted for 55 years. His son Ammon continued the evil, but thankfully only for two years.

And then came Josiah, who ruled 31 years. Josiah became king when he was just eight years old. Makes me wonder what I've been doing with my life. When he was 16, he began to seek God.

When he was 20, he began to tear down those altars to the other gods. And when he was 26, they found the book of the law, which is the first five books of our Bible and was their Bible.

You see, Manasseh had lost the Bible, but now they found it. And when Josiah read it, we're told that he acted in humble repentance. He humbled himself before God, tore his robes and wept in God's presence.

Here is humble repentance. And so God hears him and will spare him the coming judgment. And then we're told after this in the same chapter of 2 Chronicles, that Josiah renewed the covenant in

God's presence.

[4 : 41] And he vowed to follow the Lord, and notice, with all his heart. He's wholehearted. And all his soul. Here is Josiah's wholehearted obedience.

But notice how he describes the people's response. Josiah had everyone in Jerusalem pledge themselves to the covenant. Now, when you have to have someone else tell you what to do, it kind of shows your heart's not really in it, doesn't it?

Certainly, the writer of Chronicles doesn't use language of all their heart and all their soul. And so that's why God sent Zephaniah, to encourage the people to respond like Josiah, with humble repentance and wholehearted obedience.

That God might spare them, as he'll spare Josiah. And the way Zephaniah encourages them to do this, is by warning them that judgment is coming.

So, point one in your outlines, and verse two and three in your Bibles are on the screen. Zephaniah starts with a universal scope of all people. God says, I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth, declares the Lord.

[6 : 03] But I'll sweep away both man and beast, the way the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea, and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble, when I destroy all mankind on the face of the earth, declares the Lord.

Here is judgment coming upon all people. And it's reminiscent of the flood. In fact, that phrase on the second line there, from the face of the earth, is the exact same phrase God used during the flood of Noah.

It will also be a reversal of creation. Just as God filled the land with mammals, the sky with birds, the sea with fish, so he will wipe away each category.

And, at the end, the idols that cause people to stumble. As you know, an idol is anything we serve above God. And our idols of our society are things like our health, our wealth, and our happiness. And here in Victoria, our sport. What other state has two public holidays for footy and horses? Of course, an idol can be our children, or grandchildren, or nieces and nephews, and their health, wealth, happiness, or sport.

[7 : 20] But for Judah, they had physical idols of God's, like statues and poles they worshipped. And so with that, God now moves from all people to his own people, who are the real focus of chapter one.

Do you see verse four and six? He goes on to say, I will stretch out my hand against Judah and Jerusalem. Why? Well, because of their idolatrous worship, like the priests who worship Baal. But this idolatry is perhaps better described as disloyalty, because you notice in verse five, they're having an each way bet. On the one hand, they bow down to worship starry hosts, and then on the other hand, they bow down to the Lord.

Or on the one hand, they swear to the Lord, but then on the other, they also swear to the foreign God, Molech. It seems they don't fully trust God, or fully follow God, perhaps because they want to have an each way bet, or just pick the appealing bits.

It's kind of like a Christian who, you know, follows Christ in some things, but the world in other things. They pick and choose, or they don't fully trust God, and so trust the world.

[8 : 40] It's being double-minded, as James said, or double-hearted, rather than wholehearted, like Josiah. But in verse six, there wasn't just disloyalty, there's also outright apostasy.

Apostasy is when you turn back from following the Lord, and that when you no longer pray to him, or inquire of him, and sadly, we've all known people like that.

And so to wake them up, Zechariah ups the ante. He doesn't just say, this judgment is coming, he says, this judgment is near for Judah. Point to verse seven.

He goes on to say, be silent before the sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near. The Lord has prepared a sacrifice, and has consecrated those he has invited.

Here, the silence is kind of like in a courtroom, where everyone's chatting in the gallery, and discussing things, and then the bailiff says, silence or rise, for the honourable judge so-and-so, who's just about to enter the room.

[9 : 47] And so here, Zephaniah says, silence or rise, for the honourable judge Yahweh, who's just about to enter the room. The day of the Lord is near.

And in fact, Zephaniah says, God has already prepared a sacrifice, and that sacrifice is actually Judah. And the invited guests, that he's consecrated, well, they are the Babylonians, he has set

apart, to judge Judah.

Now, lest they think this is unfair, God reminds them, that their punishment is just. And so in verse eight, he goes on to describe their sin, and what will happen. He says, on the day of the Lord's sacrifice, namely your judgment, I will punish the officials, and the king's sons, and all those who clad themselves, in foreign clothes.

Here is disloyalty, disloyalty from the leadership. They're dressed in foreign clothes, because they've been worshipping foreign gods. But God will also punish the people, for their hypocrisy. On that day, I will punish all, who avoid stepping on the threshold, but then who fill the temple of their gods, with violence and deceit. Stepping on the threshold of their temple, it kind of reminds me of little kids, who kind of hop over the cracks in the cement.

[11:05] Did you ever do that when you were little? Or maybe that was just me. You know, you just do that for a bit of fun, you know, don't step on the crack or whatever, but these people do it for real. They don't tread on the threshold of their temple. They do it to, not just be superstitious, but to act all religious and pious.

Yet they do that on the one hand, and then on the other, they fill the temples, even of their own false gods, with violence and deceit. It's like Christians, who pretend to be righteous on Sundays, but then perhaps deceive people, on other days, you know, whether to save face.

Oh yeah, I sent that email. I forgot, but I'll save face. Or perhaps here in this case, to deceive others, to increase in wealth, you know, to get ahead in business.

And so their punishment will be, for God to wipe out their business, and their wealth, because that's just. So verse 10 and 11, he says, on that day, declares the Lord, a cry will go up from the fish gate, wailing from the new quarter, a loud crash from the hills.

And why will this wailing happen, all through Jerusalem? These are just places in Jerusalem, and the hills outside. Well, because God will wipe away the merchants, and all who trade with silver, will be destroyed.

[12:19] You see, they lied, and committed violence, to get ahead, and increase their wealth, and so God will wipe away their business, and their wealth. It's just punishment.

But God will not only just, punish them for disloyalty, and hypocrisy, but also their apathy. Verse 12. At that time, I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, the Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.

Wine left on its dregs, is wine that has sat too long, it's been oversellered, and so sediment, and sludge form in it. And while these people, have sat too long, doing nothing for God, their comfort has made them, complacent.

You know, apathetic. Couldn't be bothered, doing anything for the Lord. In fact, they think, God won't do anything good for them, so what's the point in praying? And they think, God won't do anything bad to them, so what's the point, in not sinning?

And this is a real danger for us, who live in comfortable Australia. Yes, life is getting harder, but it's still comfortable, compared to many countries, in our world, isn't it?

[13:32] And it can cause us, to become complacent, and apathetic, to be satisfied, with our level of commitment, with Christ, rather than seeking, to grow in Christ, or live for Christ.

I must confess, I was at home, on my day off, at one time, and I was, after dinner, I just settled down, to relax, on the couch, and my daughter, came home, and said that she passed, someone homeless, just in our street, down the road, with no jacket, he just had a t-shirt, and shorts on, and it was a cold night, and she asked, if there was anything, that we could do, and I think, I actually let out, a verbal groan, I did not, want to move, now we can't help everyone, but I could help him, yet it took me 30 minutes, to get off the couch, I confess with shame, to go and get a jacket, and drive down, and offer it to him, why?

Because my comfort, made me complacent, it's so easy, for our comfort, to make us complacent, or apathetic, when it comes to serving God, isn't it? We have to work, against it, especially because, in verse 13, God will punish it, he will take away, those things of comfort, that caused, their complacency, like their wealth, their homes, their vineyards, again it's just, punishment, the point is, judgment for Judah, is near, and their punishment, will be just, and in case, that's not enough, of a warning, Zephaniah says, that day will be, unbearable, and unsavable, point three, verse 14, he says, the great day, of the Lord, is near, near, and coming quickly, the cry, on that day, of the Lord, is bitter, the mighty warrior, shouts, his battle cry, here,

Zephaniah, ups the ante, doesn't he, he doesn't just say, it's near, like he did, back in verse 7, he now adds, it's near, and coming quickly, and then, that this day, will be, unbearably, bitter, a battle, notice what he says, it will be bitter, and he describes God, as a mighty warrior, who shouts, a battle cry, and these two, ideas of, bitterness, and battle, are then, unpacked further, in verses 15, to 16, verse 15, unpacks the bitterness, of that day, it will be a day, of distress, and anguish, trouble, and ruin, darkness, gloom, clouds, and blackness, and then verse 16, unpacks the idea, of a battle, a day of trumpet, and battle cry, against fortified cities, and against, watchtowers, the day of God's wrath, will be, an unbearable, battle, for Judah, but it also, will be, an unbearable, day, for all people, here,

Zephaniah returns, to where he started, the chapter, with all people, verse 17, he says, well God says, I will bring such distress, on all people, that they will grope about, like those who are blind, because they have sinned, against the Lord, their blood, will be pulled out, like dust, and their entrails, like dung, aren't you so glad, you came to church, this morning, but it won't just, be unbearable, it will be, unsavable, we cannot save ourselves, by our own resources, verse 18, neither their silver, nor their gold, will be able, to save them, on the day, of the Lord's wrath, and so what is Judah to do, what are we to do, well we are to seek God, with humble repentance, just like Josiah did, so point four, chapter two, verse one to three, Zephaniah says, gather together, gather yourselves together, you shameful nation, so he's talking specifically, to Judah at this point, before the decree, takes effect, and that day passes, like windblown chaff, before the Lord's fierce anger, comes upon you, before the day, of the Lord's wrath, comes upon you, notice the repetition, of before,

[17:41] Zephaniah is warning, the whole nation of Judah, to humbly repent, before it's too late, that God might relent, and spare them, like Josiah, of course God, knew their hearts, and that most would not, but some would, and so he says, to those who would heed, the warning, seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands, seek righteousness, seek humility, perhaps you'll be sheltered, on the day, of the Lord's anger, those who will heed, Zephaniah's warning, are described here, as the humble, of the land, those who continue, to seek righteousness, and more humility, you see the arrogant person, doesn't listen to warnings, do they, they think they know it all, they don't say sorry, or ask for forgiveness, they think they're never wrong, but a humble person, does both, and yet notice, at the end of verse 3, Zephaniah says, perhaps, they will be sheltered, perhaps, you see this humble, may still be caught up, in the battle, with the Babylonians, and so for them, their shelter here, is only perhaps, but it's not for us, you see the structure, of this chapter 1 here, puts Judah, in the middle, as the focus, which is why, the language of near, is applied only to them, here, but the chapter, kind of links, judgment for Judah, with us, all people, and so the idea is, if it's already happened to them, it will certainly, happen to us, it will happen, when Jesus returns, when we appear, before the judgment seat of Christ, but with, a difference, it's not, long till Christmas, is it,

I can't remember how many days, but you know what we remember, at Christmas, don't you, God sending, his only son, to be born into this world, for what purpose, well to grow up, and die for us, you see Jesus, was the sacrifice, that God prepared, for us, for he would later, grow up and die, run across, to take our punishment, for our disloyalty, for our hypocrisy, for our apathy, and if we seek him, if we humbly repent, and trust in him, we will be sheltered, on our judgment day, but not perhaps, but guaranteed, that's the difference, we'll sing soon, our next hymn, a rock of ages, which begins, with these words, rock of ages, cleft for me, hide me now, my refuge be, as you know, a cleft, is a hiding place, in a rock, a small shelter, Jesus, is our cleft, in whom, we can hide, and find shelter, his blood, guarantees, our shelter, on our day, of judgment, it's not perhaps, for us, it's guaranteed, if we seek him, by trusting in him, and so, firstly, have you, have you put your trust, in Jesus, is he your shelter, for that day, the warning is, judgment day is coming, so before that day, will you put your trust, in him, and for us, who have, then we, will we continue, to cling to Christ, as our shelter, by firstly, seeing his brilliance,

I realise, that this, talk of judgment, and it's been pretty, heavy going, I'm starting to sweat up here, I don't think it's just, the heating, but, it's, I don't know why, I decided to preach, anyway, preach the whole, counsel of God, as we heard last week, includes this week, but it is hard to hear, and yet, without it, we wouldn't see, how brilliant, Christ is, would we, it's kind of, why they put a, diamond, against a black cloth, which you can't see, on the picture there, it worked this morning, but anyway, imagine a black cloth, with a nice, shiny diamond, in the foreground, that's what, one reason, we

read these, Old Testament books, about judgment, because they are like, the black cloth, that highlights, the brilliance, of Christ, so we can see it, more clearly, and so having seen, how unbearable, and unsavable, this judgment day, will be, do you see, Christ's brilliance, more clearly, can you, feel the sweet relief, of his shelter, more deeply, that it's guaranteed, heed, we don't have to fear it, how good is that, and secondly, will we take sin, more seriously,

I mean, God does, doesn't he, that's what this whole chapter, has been about, and in fact, if we see Christ's brilliance, more clearly, then we'll want, to avoid sin, and please him, wholeheartedly, won't we, they say, there's no school, like the old school, well in the old school, prayer book, the one that's, 361 years old, that one, there is a confession, which says, this on the screen, and notice, how it describes, our sin, it talks about, bewailing, our many sins, and wickedness, which we most, grievously, have committed, against God's, divine majesty, provoking, most justly, God's wrath, and indignation, against us, it takes sin, pretty seriously, doesn't it, and so do we, such that we try, to avoid it, whether it's, disloyalty, or hypocrisy, or apathy, and instead, like Josiah, follow Christ, wholeheartedly, will we take sin, seriously, and lastly, will we continue, to seek God, humbly, when we do sin, that is, humbly repent, and ask, for forgiveness, knowing that Christ, is our shelter, and so we'll receive it, every time, that's what we heard, in our second reading, from James actually, notice how James, tells people, to come near to God, to seek God, and God will come near to us, to purify themselves, from being double-minded, or double-hearted, and to be like Josiah, with humble repentance, who grieved, and mourned, and mourned, over his sin, who tore his clothes, we don't have to do that, literally, but we are to be sorry, for our sins, aren't we, and then verse 10, to humble ourselves, before the Lord, and notice, he will perhaps, lift you up, no, he will, lift us up, we're to cling to Christ, our shelter, by seeing his brilliance, more clearly, taking our sin, more seriously, and continuing, to seek God humbly, remembering, he will, lift us up, so let's do that, last one now, let's take a moment, to thank God, for Christ, our shelter, to reflect on, whether, we've been disloyal, or complacent, and in a moment, that will join together, in saying that, old school confession, so let's just pause, for a moment of quiet, well knowing that, he will lift us up, with forgiveness, let's say this prayer, of confession, on the screen, together, we acknowledge, and bewail, our many sins, and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most previously, have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against your divine, agency, provoking, most justly, your wrath, and indignation, against us, we do, earnestly repent, and are heartily, sorry, for these, our misdoings, the remembrance, of them, is grievous, to us, the burden, of them, is incorruptible, have mercy, upon us, have mercy, upon us, most merciful,

Father, for your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us, all that is past, and grant, that we may, ever hereafter, serve, and please you, in the midst of life, to the honour, and the glory, of your name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

[26 : 09] Well, because of Christ, whose blood was shed, at the cross, we can be certain, of forgiveness, because he is our, which,