

A Day with Hope

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Date: 26 November 2023

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[0 : 00] So please turn back to Zephaniah chapter 3, page 944. As we look at the last one in our series today.

So page 944. How about I pray? Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. And as Naomi reminded us earlier on, we thank you that it is useful for teaching, correcting and training in righteousness.

And we pray, Father, that you would help us to let it do its work and do that for us this morning. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as I was mentioning in the kids' talk, hope does help us to persevere, doesn't it?

It's like the light at the end of a tunnel that helps you to get through the dark tunnel. But it even enables us to rejoice while in the tunnel, knowing what's ahead.

In other words, hope helps us to persevere and rejoice. For example, I mentioned a few weeks ago my daughter's year 12 formal, though I accidentally called it my daughter's year 12 funeral.

[1 : 13] You might remember. It was very embarrassing. But her formal was like the light at the end of her tunnel of VCE exams. It helped her to keep going.

But what I didn't say at the time was it even enabled her to rejoice during those exams. So what would happen was periodically she'd stop studying, come out of her room and talk about her formal with great joy.

She'd say, well, Monday's my last exam and then Tuesday I get my nails done and then Wednesday I pick up the dress and then I get my makeup done. I'm so glad I'm a guy. But she loved it.

The point is the future hope of her formal was so certain it caused her not only to persevere in the present, but even rejoice amidst her dark tunnel of her study.

But in Zephaniah today, we'll see something similar. We'll see a certain hope for the humble that will help them not only persevere in the present, but even rejoice facing hardship.

[2 : 22] But since this is the last sermon in the series, let me remind you of what we've seen so far. So you might remember a couple of weeks ago, chapter 1, verse 1, we're told that this happened during the time of King Josiah, who was king of Judah.

He was a good king. He found their Bible after the bad kings lost it. Their Bible is the first five books of our Bible. And when he read it, we were told in 2 Chronicles 34, you might remember, that he humbled himself before God.

He tore his robes and wept as a sign of repentance before God. And so God says, I have heard you. And later on would spare him the coming judgment.

And later on in that same chapter, Josiah then renews the covenant. And he himself says that he will follow the Lord with all his heart and all his soul.

But you might remember that I pointed out the description of the people's renewal is a little bit different, isn't it? The people, well, it says there, Josiah had everyone in Jerusalem pledge themselves to the covenant.

[3 : 32] There's no description of the people, their humble repentance or wholehearted obedience, is there? In fact, Josiah had to make them do it. And when you've got to make someone do it, it kind of tells you their heart is not in it, doesn't it?

And so that's why God sent Zephaniah, even during the time of a good king, Zephaniah to encourage the people to respond like their king, Josiah, with humble repentance and wholehearted obedience, that God might spare them just as he'll spare Josiah.

And Zephaniah did this firstly in chapter 1 by warning them that judgment is coming. So again, remember chapter 1? We saw that kind of the book ended with judgment coming for all people, but

the real target, the meat in the middle, Judah and Jerusalem.

And so their response was to seek the Lord, to humble themselves, to repent, in other words, that they might be sheltered.

And so first, Zephaniah warns them that judgment is coming, so humbly repent like Josiah. Then the rest of chapter 2, like we saw last week, Zephaniah also warns them that judgment was coming for the nations.

[4 : 48] So there's no point being like the nations. They're going to get judged anyway. But there's also vindication coming for the humble. The humble will win. So it's worth humbly repenting.

So again, humbly repent like Josiah. And while it seems some did repent, sadly, it seems many refused. And so this week actually starts with judgment for stubborn Jerusalem.

At point 1, verse 1 and 2. Have a look in your Bibles at verses 1 and 2. He says, Jerusalem refuses to accept correction.

She refuses to draw near to God in repentance. Especially her leaders, verse 3 and 4. Her officials within her are roaring lions.

Her rulers are evening wolves who leave nothing for the morning. Her prophets are unprincipled. They are treacherous people. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law.

[6 : 04] Verse 3 are talking about the secular leaders who exploit the poor like roaring lions and wolves who leave nothing till morning.

They rip off the poor and take everything from them. And verse 4 are the religious leaders. They are treacherous because back in verse 1, they led the people to not only worship God on the one hand, but to worship Baal and the starry hosts and other gods on the other hand.

But what's the first commandment? Do you remember? God said, You shall have lots of other gods besides me. No other gods besides me.

And so by leading people to worship other gods, they do violence to God's law like that first commandment. And what's worse, they're the complete opposite to God.

You see what God's like in verse 5? The Lord within her, within Jerusalem, is righteous. He does no wrong. Morning by morning, he dispenses his justice. In every new day, he does not fail.

[7 : 12] Yet the unrighteous know no shame. God is righteous, dispenses justice. But these leaders are unrighteous and dispense injustice.

They are ungodly. And they don't even feel guilty about it. They know no shame. Which shows us just how hard their hearts have become, doesn't it?

And why they didn't heed God's warning. I like the warning he talks about in verse 6. God says, I have destroyed nations. Their strongholds are demolished.

I have left their streets deserted with no one passing through. Their cities are laid waste. They are deserted and empty. You see, God warned his people, not just by sending prophets like Zephaniah, but also by destroying nations who deserved it before their very eyes.

To show them what could happen to them if they are like those nations. In fact, he'd even wiped out the northern kingdom of Israel before them. You might remember that Israel was split in two.

[8 : 27] So the northern green part, that kept the name Israel. And the southern purple part was named Judah after its biggest tribe of Judah. But in the north, in the green, because of their persistent sin, and despite the warnings for 200 years of warnings, God wiped them out before Judah's eyes.

Gone. Surely that would have been a wake-up call for Judah. Surely. And yet, verse 7. Of Jerusalem I thought, and Judah, surely you will fear me and accept correction.

Then her place of refuge would not be destroyed, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did.

You see, they stubbornly refused correction and continued to eagerly pursue corruption. Two of our kids are learning to drive at the moment, and I remember a friend of mine telling me about his son, whom we'll call Bob, not his real name, but he was learning to drive, and he was a very confident young man.

I know all teenagers are very confident, right? But this was, he was a very confident guy, and so he refused to accept any correction from his dad about driving, even when it came to parking in their very small driveway.

[9 : 59] And so you know what happened, don't you? Yeah, he crashed the car. When he came in, he came in too fast, and he ran right into the veranda. And let me tell you, judgment followed.

Well, because Jerusalem refused to accept correction, judgment will follow. Do you see verse 8? Therefore, wait for me. Not wait to be saved, but wait for me to judge.

Because, says God, I've decided to assemble the nations and the kingdoms, including yours, and will pour out my justice, my righteous wrath on you.

And there is a lesson here for us. The lesson is to learn from their mistake and accept correction from God's word when we hear it. In fact, we heard today, as Naomi prayed before the reading, that God's word is useful for correcting us.

And so will we accept it when we hear it? And by accept it, I mean believe that it's for our good. More and more these days, I was saying at 9 o'clock, particularly for younger Christians, they're doubting the goodness of God's word.

[11:15] How can this be good for me when the way of the world seems so much better? But to accept it means believe it's for our good and to live our lives by it.

It is going to get harder and harder as society moves further and further from God and his word. And churches today have already ditched parts of God's word rather than sticking to it. But that's what Judah and Jerusalem did.

And it didn't work out so well for them, did it? And so will we learn from their mistake and humbly accept correction when it comes? It's not always going to be easy, so God offers hope for the humble to help.

Point to verse 9. So have a look at verse 9. So after judgment, then I will purify the lips of the peoples that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Cush, my worshippers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. Here God says in verse 9 that he's going to work amongst the peoples, that is the nations.

[12:25] He's going to purify their lips, cause them to call on the name of the Lord and be saved, receive and find forgiveness and bring them together to serve shoulder to shoulder, that is, as one family.

And in verse 10, the focus seems to shift to the Jews, his worshippers who have been scattered by the exile. He's going to regather so that they can bring offerings to him again in Jerusalem.

And so the first part of this hope for the humble is being regathered as one people, both Jew and Gentile. For God longs to have a people he can bless.

Like verses 11 to 13, where God says, On that day Jerusalem will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from you your arrogant boasters.

Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill, but I will leave within you the meek and humble, the remnant of Israel, will trust in the name of the Lord.

[13:33] They will do no wrong, they will tell no lies. A deceitful tongue will not be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down, and no one will make them afraid.

Here is a picture of a perfect people in a perfect place, enjoying God's perfect rest. You know, eating and lying down. It kind of sounds like holidays, doesn't it?

He kind of eats and lie down and swan around. For me, it would be a bit like living in this place, you know, enjoying some fresh fruit in the morning, dozing on the white sands in the afternoon, listening to the waves just trickle in.

Yep, I'm there now. Not really. But in this world, the reality, I mean, that's what you see in the brochures, but often the reality, sadly, is this.

This is taken just a bit further down on the beach, which reminds us the real problem is people. I mean, isn't this who often causes us pain in life?

[14:35] What people do to our world or to one another or to us? We need only turn on the news to see that at the moment, don't we? Which is why the hope here includes a perfect people.

Verse 13. Can you imagine people being perfect? You know, they'll no longer litter beautiful beaches. They'll no longer cut you off on the road or jump ahead of you in the queue.

Verse 13. They'll no longer tell lies. They'll no longer do wrong. They won't have a deceitful mouth. They'll no longer fire rockets at each other.

They'll all trust in the name of the Lord and be a perfect people, in a perfect place, enjoying God's perfect rest. How good will that day be?

But wait, there's more. Just skip ahead to verse 16. Verse 16 on the right-hand side of the page says, On that day they will say to Jerusalem, Do not fear Zion, which is another name for Jerusalem.

[15 : 39] Do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, the mighty warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you. In his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.

Since God is with them, they no longer need fear anything. In fact, God will not only be with them, but amazingly he will rejoice over them, it says.

In verse 17, the line about his love is a little bit tricky to translate, but it's literally this. He will be quiet in his love.

He will rejoice over you with singing. And so the idea is that out of love, God will quietly contemplate his people and then kind of break out in joyful song over them.

Kind of like a singer who contemplates his wife in love, perhaps writes a song about her and then breaks out and sings it for her, about her with joy.

[16 : 46] Can you imagine that? Despite our sin, can you imagine God spending time contemplating you, singing over you with joy, delighting in you with gladness?

But wait, there's even more. Verse 18. I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you.

At that time, I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame. I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered 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.

Is that not a picture of our second reading? You know, the new Jerusalem where everything is made new, restored, where there'll be no more loss that burdens us.

[17 : 48] For Judah, it was the loss of her festivals. For some in our world, it's the loss of worshiping God openly. For us, it might be the loss of things or our reputation at work because we follow Christ.

Or the loss of our ability to serve God as much as we once did. Or the loss of loved ones. Loss causes burden and grief.

But on that day, God will remove all who mourn because there'll be no more loss. And so there'll be no more mourning. And he'll rescue the oppressed and the lame, it says.

No more sickness that causes lameness. No more evil that causes oppression. So no more pain. Just complete restoration. Life to the full on that day.

How good will that day be? In fact, God says twice, he will give us honour and praise in front of all people. Can you imagine that?

[18 : 53] Our society. Praising Christians. Oh, you follow Jesus. That's fantastic. Let me throw a special morning tea for you. Oh no, actually, come and be our CEO.

I think Optus has a vacancy. But it's hard to fathom that we'll receive honour and praise in front of all people. Although this comes from God, doesn't it?

But it will happen on that day. And Zephaniah is so sure of it, even though it's hard for us to fathom it, he tells the humble to rejoice now. Point three. Come back with me to verse 14.

See verse 14. Sing, daughter Zion. Shout aloud, Israel. Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, daughter Jerusalem.

You see, four times he effectively tells them to rejoice now, to sing, shout, be glad, rejoice. Why? Because he knows this hope for the humble is certain.

[19 : 56] Hope that includes all those blessings we've seen. And especially verse 15. 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. God has taken away their punishment.

Turned away the Babylonians whom he used to punish them. And in fact, it's by taking away their punishment that God can now give them hope. It kind of reminds me of someone who takes away our punishment so that God can then give us hope, doesn't it?

And God will be with them as their king, so they need not fear anything. Here it seems the promised king from David's line becomes God himself. But again, that should be familiar to us, shouldn't it?

A king born at Christmastime in David's line who is also God himself. Ring any bells? It starts with G's, ends with us. The point here is the future hope is so certain Zephaniah tells the humble to rejoice now.

[21 : 06] And this hope helped the humble persevere and rejoice. About 70 years after exile in 516 BC, God did regather his people and the temple was rebuilt.

But it wasn't quite that day that we see here in Zephaniah. It wasn't complete fulfillment. And that's because that day finds its true fulfillment, like every promise of God, in Christ.

But the way Christ fulfills it is through two advents. Advent starts next Sunday. Can you believe it's here already? You guys ready for it? Advent. But Advent refers to Jesus' first coming into the world. And so that day really begins with that Advent. When he came into the world at Christmas, born as both God and man in David's line, who would grow up and take away our punishment at the cross so that God could give us hope, including the blessings of that day.

And since that first Advent has already happened, then that day has already begun. We have already begun to enjoy some of those blessings we've seen in Zephaniah.

[22 : 21] Like having our lips purified that we might call on the name of the Lord and find forgiveness. Like being able to serve him shoulder to shoulder together as one family. I mean, it's what we're doing here now, isn't it? We're sitting shoulder to shoulder.

People from the nations. Serving God together. Plus we need not fear anything for King Jesus is with us. He is Emmanuel. He will provide for our needs.

And in Christ, God even rejoices over us. Despite our ongoing sin, God spends time contemplating you and rejoicing over you.

That day has already begun with the first Advent of Jesus. So we can already enjoy some of the blessings of that day if we believe in him.

And so do you? Do you believe in Jesus? The blessings of that day though, or rather that day ends with the second Advent of Jesus when he returns to judge the world.

[23 : 26] For then he will vindicate us and praise us in the eyes of the world. He will make us a perfect people both inside and out. No more sin on the inside. No more broken bodies on the outside.

And he will make this world perfect so we can enjoy perfect rest with him. No more loss. No more mourning. No more pain. This is our hope for us who believe in Jesus.

And so we too have reason to persevere and rejoice now, don't we? In fact, we've even got more reason than Zephaniah had because we've already begun to enjoy some of those blessings and because the rest of them are even more certain.

And so do we not just persevere, but do we persevere and rejoice because of the hope we have? Even amidst our tears and difficulties, do we still thank God when we pray for help and his provision because of what the hope we have in Christ?

Do we still smile despite our hardships because of the hope we have in Christ? Do we persevere and rejoice? Or have we forgotten just how extraordinary this hope is?

[24 : 44] Well, let me finish by telling you about this man. Some of you might recognise him. Tomorrow marks the one-year anniversary of John Miller's passing.

He used to attend this congregation. He suffered for years with Parkinson's and leukaemia and his wife still has MS. So three things together.

Needless to say, life was not easy. At times it got them down. It drove them to prayer and sometimes to tears. But in the midst of it, they still rejoiced in Christ.

In fact, John would crack jokes about his shaking hands. The only downside to having a new body without Parkinson's would be that he'd no longer be able to make milkshakes easily.

And as he pondered being perfect in body and spirit, and even more so as he pondered being with his Saviour and Lord, his face would light up with joy.

[25 : 49] It was a sight to behold. His hope in Christ caused him, you see, not just to persevere, but to also rejoice. Let's pray we would do the same.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we pray that you would help us to keep pondering the hope we have in Christ of how glorious and certain it is that we might not just persevere through hard times in life, but also rejoice in you.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.