

The Presence, Power and Pleasure of God

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to the prophecy of Zephaniah and chapter 3, and we're going to read at verse 17. Zephaniah 3 and at verse 17.

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.

He will exult over you with loud singing. Always when we turn to the word of God, historical context is important.

And we have these words written by Zephaniah. We have them, as we see at the beginning of the prophecy, in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon king of Judah.

And that was one of the high points in the experience of the children of Israel. And in that time, it was perhaps an exceptional time because there was perhaps more low points than high points during that period in the history of the children of Israel.

[1 : 17] And it is into that kind of situation where things were generally dark and on the slide that God does, by way of habit, he speaks into these days and he reminds them of the coming Messiah.

And when you read through all of these prophecies, that idea is never too far away. And the only hope that they do have, whatever the historical context is, that the Messiah is going to come.

And when you read in verse 16 the words, And of course, the Messiah, the Messiah, the Christ of God, he is at the center of our worship and he is at the center of our salvation.

And the other thing that we can say about history and about providence is that God also has the habit of bringing good news into bad news.

And he's got the habit, down through the history of his people, of creating providences into which his light shines. In other words, he creates for himself opportunities so that the bright light of the promise of the Messiah shines into the world.

[2 : 46] And he still does that for ourselves, of course. He is the God who works in our lives, creating opportunities for himself so that Christ will shine into our lives and so that we'll see the relevance, the suitability and the beauty of Christ.

And tonight we want to look at these words and to see how the way in which he points them in that direction ought to transform their present experience.

And then see, of course, what that says to ourselves. And the first thing I want to notice is that we have in the passage, in these words, the presence of God.

And if we follow the story of the people of God, we regularly come across two things. The presence of God and the absence of God.

And these are the two things that create a crisis in the experience of the people of God. And it is suggested to us here that we are facing a situation where God is absent.

[3 : 52] And in order to transform that situation, God comes with this promise of his own royal presence. The Lord, your God, is in your midst.

You see the way in which he binds the promise of his presence with them. He is the Lord Jehovah, who is the covenant God of Israel.

But he is their God. And he wants to draw attention to that at the very beginning. That this Lord is your God. And let's grasp a handle on that tonight.

That the God whom we are worshipping is your God and my God. He is not somebody else's God. He is our God. And what we need to grasp along with that is that your God and my God, who is the covenant God of his people, is in your midst.

He is here, Siphon and I are saying. And God is saying, he is here tonight. And the promise to down through the experience of the people of God from the days of the Exodus was that God would be with his people.

[5 : 11] And he comes in Exodus 25. He promises to come and he says to Moses, here I will be with you. Over the ark of the covenant between the cherubim. And then he promises to go with them along their journey in the wilderness.

He will be with them. He will go before them. He will come behind them. He will be their presence. And that presence with them will ensure that they will have success.

And that they will prosper. And that they will go forward. And when we think of God in that way, being present with his people, we remind ourselves that he is saying these things because of the assumption that he is absent.

And we can ask ourselves tonight, and you can ask yourself tonight, where do you think God is? Have you come to worship God tonight looking for God because in some way you think he is absent from your life?

And you have come here looking for an absentee. And you want to come to the word of God and you want to find this person whom you consider to be absent.

[6 : 25] And the promise of God and the message of God and the message of God's word to use that he is present. And when we read the history of the children of Israel in the Old Testament, we see in the prophecy of Ezekiel, for example, that what God did was he left his people.

And we have that illustrated picture of the wheels and the glory of God departing over the threshold of the temple and going on to the mountain east of the temple.

So the presence of God is gone. And then further on in Ezekiel 47, we have the promise of the presence coming back to the place that God had vacated.

And here the prophet is pointing to that great day when the departed God, who has gone to dwell outside of the city, will at last himself return.

And of course we come into the New Testament and that's exactly what God is doing in the person of Jesus. What do we see and what do we understand from the coming of the Son of God into the world?

[7 : 40] It is the beginning of the return of God himself. It's not something that we initiated. It's not anything that we had control over. It is on that day, on time, in time, God comes.

Emmanuel, God with us, born in the manger in Bethlehem. The glorious returning, the first step in the return of the glory. In order to fulfill that great promise given in Ezekiel.

Then I see Jesus and I hear him standing at the feast in John chapter 7. And he bellows out, if anyone is thirsty, let them come to me.

And let them drink. And John goes on to speak of the way in which out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

The power and the presence of God returning. And we are here tonight and all of these things have taken place. He was speaking of his resurrection. And so we have the glory of Christ.

[8 : 49] And the beauty of Christ. And the magnificence of Christ. At God's right hand. God is in your midst. And from there, the Son of God.

The anointed Christ of God. He is the dispenser of the Holy Spirit of God. And his sentiment to the world.

And his sentiment to your heart. And God wants you to note tonight that as you're looking for the God that you may consider to be absent. That you need to look no further than your own heart. Because that's the temple in which he resides today. In the temple of the soul, of the heart, of the lives of the people of God. Your body is the temple of the Spirit.

And in that powerful way we have the fulfillment of all that Siphonai was speaking. All that Ezekiel was speaking. And that power of God.

[9 : 54] That presence of God. Dwells now with us. And that was powerful for those who were broken. And those who were looking for the presence of God who was absent.

They were looking for God to come back. And that presence of God was there to rebuild people's lives. To shore up and to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

And the temple in Mount Zion. He is the master builder. And the master rebuilder. He comes to be present.

And C.S. Lewis has an interesting picture. And the story of his own life. When he was converted. And God came into his life. And he was living in his house.

And God comes in to rebuild his house. And he says he thought first of all that God was going to come and to live in the cottage of his life.

[11 : 04] But then he discovered that when God came. He came in and he was knocking down partitions. He was building extensions. He was in the purpose not of making C.S. Lewis comfortable in the cottage of the first day of him becoming a Christian.

He was there to build, says C.S. Lewis, a royal palace for himself. Because he intends to dwell there.

Isn't God great? That his palace tonight is in many ways your life and mine. He desires to be there. And he's got a massive rebuilding job, doesn't he? But he's doing it for himself. And he's doing it so that the fullness of his glory will dwell in your cottage.

Which he is transforming into a mansion. Where his royal presence will dwell. And which his royal presence will fill. And that presence of God, of course, brings about a transformation.

[12 : 14] It brings about an inner transformation. And it brings about an external one. And where tonight do you think yourself that you need to be transformed first?

You have come with your desire for God. With your longing after him. And which part of you is his presence going to transform first? Is it not the innermost corner of your being?

Is it not your emotions and your affections and your whole will, your whole being from the inside is going to be transformed? And that's exactly what the prophet promises here.

Your fear will be taken away. Fear not, O Zion. In verse 16, let your hands, let not your hands grow weak.

Fear not. Fear not. Fear not. The anxieties that they had in their minds. That robbed them of the ability to be practical servants of God.

[13 : 27] And they lost that inner sense of the power of God in their souls and their hearts. And they were close to being useless in the souls of God.

And now when the presence of God comes, God is saying to them, fear not, O Zion. You, the people in whom am I going to dwell, do not fear. Let that anxiety that leaves you in your emotions and your affections, that leaves you lacking in trust in God.

And perhaps close to rebellion against God because of that absence of trust. Stop being afraid. And that's, as we know, that's how God transforms our experience in a moment.

He'll come and He'll show you that He's with you. And your anxiety is gone. And everything that paralyzed you in following God, in serving God, in being a witness for God, everything that paralyzed you is then taken away.

He silences that turmoil in your innermost being. And we all want God to do that for us tonight.

[14 : 50] There's perhaps not any of us who in some way don't have our own anxieties. And don't have our own concerns. And we wish that they weren't there because we do feel that we would be much better without them.

And some burdens God gives to us for His own purposes and for our good. But we all have things that we need to be rid of.

And only the presence of God will do that. When He comes, He will speak closely and intimately with the innermost part of the heart.

And as soon as He does that, we're ready to witness for Him. We're ready to serve Him. If He says to me, go and remember my death, I will go and remember His death.

If He says to me, go and make disciples of all nations, I will go and make disciples. Because the anxiety that restricted me is gone. And now as He says here, let not your hands grow weak.

[15 : 53] Perhaps the closest thing that we can think of is somebody going around with their hands in their pockets. You're not really doing anything. And sometimes we're like that in God's kingdom.

And we need the presence of God so that our hands will come out of our pockets. And that illustrate a way and so that we will use our hands and use our feet for the service of Christ's kingdom.

And you know, when that happens, He goes on to make it quite clear in verse 15. You shall never again fear evil. And that's that in itself.

It's an interesting statement because how often the pendulum of our experience swings. We go from fearing and inactivity and we go to sense the presence of God.

And we're going to do everything for God. And before the next day comes, we've lost our energy. But when the presence of God comes to the people of God, it's there to stay.

[16 : 59] This is my rest. But, said the psalmist, or said God through the psalmist in Psalm 132, Here I delight to dwell. He has chosen it for His habitation.

The promise of the presence of God. Oh, that He would come in that experiential way. He is there according to His promise.

And He is there in the power of His Holy Spirit. But tonight, we want His presence to be filled. Because, can we be the people of God without feeling the presence and feeling the love of Christ? Surely not. Tonight, we want His presence to so envelop us and to so fill us. That we'll feel that He's here.

And from feeling that He's here, that we'll be ready to do anything and everything for Him. Tonight and tomorrow. And long after this communion season is over, we're going to be active serving Him every day of our lives.

[18 : 08] Because His presence is with us. He's here to stay. The presence of God. Secondly, I want us to notice that we have also in the passage something about the power of God.

And presence and power are so closely related that they cannot be separate when we think and speak about God. The Lord, your God, is in your midst.

A mighty one who will save. He is a mighty one. He is a great warrior. He is a fighter.

He is a fighter. Who read in Psalm 45, Put your sword upon your thigh, O you who are great of might. The presence of God and the Christ of God is a great warrior.

And one of the names given to the promised Messiah in Isaiah chapter 9 is exactly that. He is the wonderful counselor. He is the eternal father.

[19 : 20] He is the mighty God. And he is the prince of peace. A mighty one. What do we have by the power of the Spirit of God in our midst?

It is nothing less than the presence of Christ Himself. And He is the mighty warrior of God who has come to save His people. And for the people in Jerusalem, salvation was from their enemies. Who seemed to be more powerful than themselves. The mighty one was here to deliver them from their enemies.

And His power in action did exactly that. His power dealt with the two things in their lives which paralyzed them before God and which left them under the judgment of God.

And when there is a mighty one to save who is the Christ of God who is the promised one. When He comes, He has in verse 15, taken away the judgments against you.

[20 : 38] What judgments? Whose judgments are they? Why are the judgments there? In a real way, the judgment has two things in it.

And the first of these is that God is absent because of the sins of the people. So judgment equals the absence of God because the people of God have sinned against Him.

And the judgment of God also in another way includes the presence of God. But this time, the God is present to be their enemy.

And that's what changed the whole experience of the children of Israel in the Old Testament. God was present with them in a saving way first of all.

But because of their sin, God's salvation left them and He turned to be their enemy. And the judgment on them is His judgment and it's on them because of their sin.

[21 : 46] And so now when the presence of God comes, it comes with the power of God. And the power of God is working in order to remove that.

The Lord has taken away the judgment against you. There's a short trip from these words to Calvary's cross.

Why do I see Jesus at Calvary? Because He's there bearing my curse. He's there bearing my sin. And He's under the judgment of God.

And if the people of God are left without God in Jerusalem, here I see Jesus on the cross at Calvary. And He is left without God.

Because the judgment of God is upon Him. And in the moment that Jesus cries out under the judgment of God, cries out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[22 : 47] The judgment of God, the penalty that is due to them is inflicted upon Him. And then I hear the cry of victory from the cross.

When He says, Finished! And He breathes His last. Takes away the judgments. And that's the power that works in our lives tonight.

That the judgment of God has been taken away. That it has been carried and set aside in that legal way so that it no longer touches our lives.

And the theology of that, if we wanted to explore that, is that we're justified. And pardoned. And there's no more condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.

What power! It deals with the heart of the matter. Which is the matter of the heart, which is their sin and rebellion against God.

[23 : 58] But there is one other thing. And that is that they have enemies. And that power of God also, in verse 15, cleared away your enemies.

The Assyrians who are going to come to swamp the northern part of the kingdom. The Babylonians who are going to come and destroy Jerusalem itself. And now, in this great day, these judgments are going to be gone.

And I hear Jesus on the way to Calvary's cross and I hear him saying to the disciples, now is the judgment of this world.

Now is the prince of this world, the God of this world, the prince of this world, cast out. What's he doing? At the same time, as he's suffering for my sin on Calvary's cross, he is strangling, he is taking the power of the biggest enemy that I have, the roaring lion who seeks to devour me.

And there, he is on Calvary's cross and he's taking the power of him. He's tying with chains and he's throwing him down. And tonight, because of the power of Christ, he no longer has power over me.

[25 : 20] And the presence of God brings me to realize the great power of God. It has freed me from the penalty of my sin before God and has freed me from the God of this world who's so powerful and mighty in my eyes at times and I see him before me and I cannot do anything about him because he's so much stronger than I.

And God is saying to me, my presence has dealt with that. Don't look at the size of the problem. Look at the size of the answer.

And every time I see the enemy of my soul wanting to strangle me, then I go to Calvary's cross and I see there that my judgments are taken away.

And I see there that also my enemy is forever defeated. The power of God. Don't we need to grasp that as we long for the presence of God?

The victory that Christ has secured for us. The presence of God. The power of God.

[26 : 41] And finally, the pleasure of God. Isn't God a good God? And we should never lose sight in our salvation that perhaps there is more pleasure in God's own heart in the light of our salvation than there is in ours.

And that's what we have as we come to the end of this verse 17. We have the pleasure of God in His own people. He will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will not quiet you by His love, but He will be quiet or rest in His love. and that to me is clearly what the Hebrew language is saying.

He will rest quietly in His love. He will exalt over you with loud singing. The pleasure of God. And as we think of that tonight, I want us to think of the lens through which God sees His people and sees you tonight.

How do you think He sees you? We see Him through the lens of our sin and through the lens of the person of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 04] And in the pleasure of God tonight, He looks down upon His people and He looks down upon them through the same lens, through the lens of His Son.

And when I think of God looking down upon me, I think of Him as if I were putting on glasses in that sense and see me through the passion of the Son of God.

And I see Him looking down upon me not through the passion of His Son on the cross at Calvary, but I think of Him looking down through the lens of the passion of His Son as He is in glory with Him.

That's where Jesus is tonight, is it not? He's at the right hand of the majesty on high. He is there, of course, because of the cross and because of His obedience, He's given a name which is above every name.

And from the throne of the universe tonight, God is looking through His Son. And He's looking through His Son to see you where you are.

[29 : 11] and when He does that, His pleasure is excited. His whole being is moved because of you.

Isn't that magnificent? That your God tonight, when you feel yourself so unlike and so far away from that He sees you so differently.

And that because He sees you through that lens, we see first of all that He has the feeling of divine joy. That's what we have in these first words.

He will rejoice over you with gladness. that deep sense of inner delight and joy that arises from a sense of what goes on in the heart of God.

We spoke earlier about our own anxieties being removed and having that peace in our own hearts because of the presence of God. And here we now have the heart of God.

[30 : 24] And in the heart of God there is that feeling of joy and gladness. God is not an object that's that we can touch but has no emotions and no feelings and cannot be moved.

He is the God who is so moved to save us in His love that He sent His Son. And now when His Son has done all of that work and when He's at His right hand He looks down and God feels happy because of His people.

And we say that with all respect and with all reverence because there is that happiness in God over you.

Let's consider that. God along with that feeling of joy there is also the contentment that arises from His adoration.

God adores His people. He looks down upon them and His heart is made with love around them. And that's what we have in the middle of these phrases.

[31 : 51] He will be quiet in His love. And of course not in love as it is that state of His will and that expression of His will in the emotion of love but in the object of His love.

He will be quiet. He will rest in His love. And you will remember that when God created the worlds and at the end of Genesis chapter 1 we read that God saw everything that He had made and it was all very good.

And then in Genesis 2 God rested on the seventh day. And here we have the same creator God in the new creation of the people of God looking down on the finished work of that new creation in the life of the people of God and He's resting and He's seeing it and He's saying it is all very good.

It's in accordance with His design and He loves it with that contentment and that contemplation that He looks down and that He is quiet.

And sometimes we ourselves find ourselves in that place where we see the beauty of Christ as our Savior and where we don't want anyone to disturb the intimacy that God has given to us with His Son.

[33 : 36] we're resting and we're quiet and we're meditating and we're adoring the Son of God.

And here tonight God wants us to think of the pleasure that He has and the contentment that He has as He adores the people of God.

and allow yourself tonight that through the presence of God and the power of God in your life as the child of God that God has great pleasure in what He sees in you.

You are His handiwork says Paul created in Christ Jesus for good works for hands out of the pockets time and for serving Him but created by Him and that pleasure comes at last with a kind of shout of victory He will exert over you with loud saying it's a sense of triumph there was triumph on the cross when Jesus cried out with a loud voice it is finished after saying to His Father into your hands I commend my spirit I commit my spirit and now here is God and it's as if God cannot contain His joy and cannot contain His delight and He exalts He

He shouts for joy He exclaims He lets it all out the joy that He has in seeing the people of God He is the bridegroom who looks down upon His bride and she is perfectly beautiful she is completely adorable and He is absolutely absorbed inner and inner beauty and it's not without reason that Jesus himself in Luke chapter 15 in speaking about repentance and in speaking about that passage where He is sitting with publicans and sinners this man receives sinners and eats with them and Jesus goes on and time after time He says there is more joy in heaven over one sinner repenting a joy not in the people of

[36 : 23] God but that joy in himself as the father comes and embraces the son and takes him home let us eat and celebrate for this my son who was lost and is found he was dead and he is alive again the divine pleasure let's go home tonight and let's rejoice in the abiding presence of God through the power of his Holy Spirit as the presence of Christ let's rejoice in the power of God as it is ours because of the work of the Christ of God and taking away our sin and defeating your enemies let's allow ourselves to think about God so often our salvation is caught up with thinking

about ourselves but let's think about what God is thinking and what God is doing and let's remind ourselves that he looks over us through the lens of

Christ and that he loves us and takes delight in us may God bless his word to his ladies bow heads in prayer