

Our Saving, Satisfied, Singing God

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[0 : 00] And I'd like us tonight to look at verse 17 and take our main points from verse 17. Zephaniah chapter 3 and 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.

And Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah. Without going into the history of it too much, if you look at the account you have in the scriptures of the time of Jeremiah and Jeremiah's own prophecy, you can get from that an accurate picture of the circumstances in which Zephaniah also lived.

We are told here at the beginning of his short prophecy that the word of the Lord came to him in the days of Josiah, the son of Ammon, king of Judah.

It could well be that, as you know, a great reform took place under Josiah's leadership, a reformation, if you like, during his kingship.

[1 : 11] It may well be that Zephaniah's ministry was placed just before that reform. We can't be sure, but it could be that the teaching that he gave, the ministry of this prophet, that it itself was used by God towards helping Josiah to instigate and to push on with these reforms that he introduced in the land, where he cleaned away much of the idolatry and where he sought to reestablish the people in covenant with God.

In any case, that's the kind of situation that Zephaniah faced in Judah. And his message, as we see even from this short prophecy, was one of emphasizing the day of the Lord.

Way back at verse 7 of the first chapter, you can see, Be silent before the Lord God, for the day of the Lord is near. And much of what follows on in this prophecy is about the day of the Lord.

But the day of the Lord has two sides to it, and it's a concept that follows through into the New Testament, as you know as well, the day of the Lord, the day of Christ, going all the way through to the day of judgment at Christ's return.

But within that whole concept of the day of the Lord, in whatever way generation it was emphasized, there are two sides to it, if you like. There is, on the one hand, the gloom and the judgment and the wrath that's mentioned in Zephaniah against the enemies of the Lord, against those who are concerned to live in disobedience to God and to be still continuing with idolatrous behavior.

[2 : 45] And on the other side, there is the message of hope as well, because the day of the Lord brings, as it brings defeat to his enemies, so the Lord brings salvation to his people. And as he brings salvation to his people, there's the message of deliverance, salvation, victory, rejoicing.

And both of these are due to the action of God, both these aspects of the day of God, both the judgmental side and also the salvation and rejoicing side, are due to the Lord himself as the mighty one.

This is a term that's used throughout the Old Testament as well. You'll find it here in verse 17, A mighty one who will save. The Lord your God in your midst is the mighty one who will save.

You could translate it that way. And every time you come across this saying, this description of God, the mighty one, it has to do with, it presents us with the imagery of this great warrior, the divine warrior.

As many of the commentators and theologians express it, the warriorship of God, the God who is the divine conqueror, the warrior who goes out at the head of the armies, spiritually speaking, and brings defeat to his enemies, but salvation through that to his people.

[4 : 06] And all the way through you have that emphasis, and in this verse as well, that emphasis is the mighty one, the warrior king. And as we say, that carries on through into the New Testament, where of course it comes to its climax in Jesus himself, the mighty one, the warrior who came to defeat death and Satan and bring deliverance to his people.

And there are three things that follow on from that, three points that we're going to take from verse 17, under that introductory emphasis of the divine warrior.

There is, first of all, God's residency, God living in the midst of his people. Secondly, there's God's rejoicing. He will rejoice over you with gladness.

And thirdly, there's God's resting, because we're going to take it that it's God that's meant in verse 17, where he says, he will quiet you by his love.

As we'll see, that can be translated very readily as he will rest in his love. He will rest in his people, in his love. He will rest in them.

[5 : 13] So God's residency, rejoicing and resting. We could take as a title, if you like, our saving, satisfied, singing God, because these are the three things that characterize him.

The saving God is a satisfied God in his salvation, and he is a singing God. And remarkably, he says, he will exult over you with loud singing.

That's God that's mentioned there. First of all, God's residency. Supposing the queen was to pay a visit to your home. Supposing you got a telegram, well, it wouldn't be a telegram nowadays, it'd be probably an email or a tweet or something like that.

But it's something official to say, I would like to actually come and have tea with you next month. Well, there she is.

You can just picture the queen and all the preparations you'd make for her coming. You could say that for however long she stayed, it won't be very long, but that she was a resident in your home for that short time.

[6 : 19] It would be very temporary, but also whatever she would engage in, whether you should have tea or just call in and then quickly out again. She would not actually give all her influence and all her power over to you for your benefit.

It would keep most of that to herself. Yes, you could say the queen actually came into my house. I sat down, I had tea with her, but she didn't actually give me her tiara, she didn't give me her jewels, she didn't give me anything of her influence, her power, her place.

She retained all that herself. When God comes to be in the midst of his people, he gives them his power for their benefit. He gives them status akin to royalty.

He gives them everything they require through his presence, his influence and his power becomes yours. God actually living in the midst of his people means that you can say, he is actually, my God, we are his palace.

This is the remarkable thing. This is the thing people don't tend to understand about the church, that it's not a building, it's not something of that sort of edifice. God actually has his church as his people.

- [7 : 33] They are his, they are his people, they are his church and they are his palace. Yes, he resides in heaven and that's where he will bring his people to be with him in the highest sense. But tonight, as God is in this place, as God occupies his place in our midst, he is and we are privileged to have this as his palace, to entertain him in the proper sense of that word, to be as we saw on the Lord's day, his guests at services or at the Lord's table.
- But he is the one who is in the midst and he has fulfilled that promise in Christ. Therefore, we can say, we are his residency. A remarkable thing in itself.
- And you know, in Psalm 68, where the words that are again quoted in Ephesians, to do with the Lord's resurrection, you have ascended up on high and led captivity captive.
- In other words, the powers that held us captive in sin, Satan, Christ, defeated them and he made a show of them openly, as the Bible says elsewhere.
- There's the imagery there that as he went back up to heaven, they were in chains behind him, just like the Roman generals used to have their defeated foes following after them to show that he had been defeated by him.
- [8 : 49] Well, that's what Jesus did. You have brought captivity into captivity. Those who kept us captive, the powers that kept us captive, he has taken them captive.
- He has spoiled them. He has chained them up. Why is that? Well, the verses go on to say in Psalm 68, you have led captivity captive.
- You have received gifts for men, for human beings. What are they? What's the preeminent one? So that the Lord God might dwell amongst them.
- That's the great gift. We think of Jesus as the gift. And of course, he is the gift. Everything really comes back to depend upon the finished work of Christ. But the finished work of Christ is what provided us with the presence of God through the Holy Spirit so that the Lord God might dwell amongst us.
- And here is verse 17 really anticipating that. The Lord was through for them in the Old Testament. This is projecting things forward into the new as well. The Lord your God in your midst is the mighty one or the Lord as it's translated is in your midst a mighty one who will save.
- [10 : 05] And that's why the likes of verse 15 there has actually taken that great fact and applied it practically in the way that it does.
- Here's what it says. The King of Israel, the Lord is in your midst. So what, someone might say? Well, you shall never again fear evil.
- That's the practical outcome of it. There is no power now in any way whatever access they may have partially to your life but they will never control you. They will never get near you to the extent as to be dominant in your life again.
- You don't need to fear them because God is in your midst. God is resident. The King is here. And therefore that's sufficient.
- Now you take that with you to the Lord's table as well to the Lord's Supper because this divine warrior in Jesus Christ the warrior that Christ himself is who is now in the midst of his people he came into this world this divine warrior died this divine warrior rose again from the dead this divine warrior is exalted and he's exalted as exalted through his spirit he's with us.
- [11 : 19] It's a wonderful thought isn't it? As you're anticipating the Lord's table next Lord's day that when we sit together around these elements that represent the death of Jesus we do so remembering the Lord's death in that our action is directed to do that but we also do it anticipating his presence with us.

He's not dead though we're remembering his death and not only that but he is actually with us in the journey that we're on God's residency is not just so that he'll come and then quickly go he doesn't do that it's not so that we can say he's with us temporarily it's not so that we can say that he's like a bed and breakfast guest he comes we give him some reception we welcome him but then we know he's not going to stay very long thankfully it's not like that he has come to reside here forever more in his people and that will be the same in glory which the Lord's table anticipates that he will reside with us forever God's residency secondly God's rejoicing well salvation God's salvation is always at the root of God's people's rejoicing and all the way through the Old Testament and indeed into the New as well as you very well know

God's people are frequently characterized not by mourning and not by sorrow but by joy yes they have the others as well of course but how often you find through the Old Testament and in the book of Psalms Zion is called upon to rejoice in God look at verse 14 here as well after he has actually finished with the passage in chapter 3 here that deals with the day of wrath from the point of view of God's of God's wrath the day of the Lord God's wrath and God's judgment God's dealing with his enemies and he changes in verse 14 he comes to focus on the deliverance of his people he comes to focus on what he has for them so he says sing aloud oh daughter of Zion rejoice and exult with all your heart oh daughter of Jerusalem why the Lord has taken away the judgments against you he has cleared away your enemies you know you sit at the Lord's table and that is what you are aware of

I know we still have much that interferes with our assurance from that much that interferes without very understanding and grasp of all of that but when you sit at the Lord's table and you are looking at that bread and you are looking at that cup and you take that bread and you take that cup to yourself this is what you can actually say I can rejoice because God has cleared away all my enemies sin is not my master anymore the devil is not a governor in my life the world for all its opposition and for all its bite and for all its sometimes persecution that is not the dominant power in my life that is not where my assurance comes from and that is not where I rest it is in this that God himself is with me and in me but not only so but I have rejoicing because of that however the rejoicing in the verse actually lest we get carried away on that tangent which we could easily do the rejoicing is not the rejoicing of the Lord's people you notice it's the rejoicing of God he will rejoice over you with gladness this Lord the mighty one the mighty warrior who is in your midst he will rejoice over you with gladness it's God who is represented as rejoicing himself

God himself rejoicing similar to Isaiah where you find chapter 65 of Isaiah where God speaks about creating a new heaven a new heavens and a new earth which of course is taken up again in the New Testament with regard to the return of Christ ultimately it is behold I create new heavens and a new earth and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind but be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create for behold I create Jerusalem to be a joy and her people to be a gladness I will rejoice in Jerusalem and I will be glad in my people he's taking the two things together he's saying this is the cause of my people's rejoicing I'm creating a new heaven and a new earth I'm clearing away the debris of sin I'm placing righteousness in the place of that and I rejoice myself

[16 : 27] God is saying in Jerusalem and be glad I will be glad in my people and it's it's in verse 17 here of Zephaniah 3 he says he will exult over you with loud singing I will rejoice over you with gladness we have something of a problem theologically with the thought of God rejoicing because many times in the Bible you find human characteristics used to try and present us with something we can understand about God who is a spirit of course there's the humanity of Jesus which is a very real humanity and has all these physical and moral and spiritual attributes too as a human being does but here is God I will he says rejoice over you with gladness and there's something more there than just saying that God in the sense of his son incarnate rejoicing there's something in the depths of God and we need to be careful in that he doesn't have human emotions like we have or at least exactly like ours he's not fickle he doesn't have the kind of emotional life that we have which is up and down and so affected by things one way or the other

God is always consistent and unchangeable and steady but there is something nevertheless conveyed to us here and other similar expressions that in the heart of God as God there is a thing called delight there is rejoicing over his salvation and over his people and even if we can't describe that that's what the Bible presents us with there is that very real element of rejoicing in the depths of God himself in his love for his people in his salvation of his people that's really what's brought out here he will rejoice over you with gladness it's really something similar to the creative work of a craftsman where you find a skilled craftsman so concentrated on the work they're doing whether it's metal work wood fabric whatever it is craftsmanship whether it's male or female but the skill is put to work and then when the product is finished isn't there an element there of rejoicing isn't there an element there of satisfaction with the work of that person's hand there is indeed there's a delight in that it gives that person great satisfaction and it's true as we'll see too of

God's resting that there is that same emphasis in it now you take that into the Lord's Supper as well and here again you find the two things coming together both sides of it God's side and ours not just as we said that God resides in us and we abide in him in Christ here God rejoices in his people and at the same time we rejoice in him we are glad and we rejoice in our God we fulfill the end for which he created us in the beginning to glorify him and to enjoy him and there's nothing whatsoever wrong with enjoying God and wanting to enjoy God more and more my lament is I don't do it anything like enough I don't have as much of that as I ought to have maybe that's your complaint as well but we have to emphasize there's absolutely nothing wrong with us saying to the world we have a cause for rejoicing and we want you to share it with us but there's also

God's rejoicing in his people you remember well-known words of Psalm 132 where David in regard to the ark carried the ark back with gladness with rejoicing to its rightful place Psalm is based upon that great event where he said that he would not actually give himself even sleep until he had brought the ark back to its resting place and then that Psalm finishes with God's great declaration for the Lord has chosen Zion he has desired it for his dwelling place this is my resting place forever here I will dwell for I have desired it God's desire God's delight God's rejoicing in his people and choosing his people and living amongst his people and blessing his people and saving his people and being the God of his people think about that if God spares us to see the Lord's day and coming to sit at his table by all means seek to rejoice in God but you know even more remarkably try and fill your mind with the thought that actually

God is rejoicing in us that God is taking delight in us as his redeemed people and that thought will both humble and exalt us it will humble us because we know it's not something we deserve and it will exalt us too with a sense of great privilege and a sense of joy and a sense of rejoicing and celebration and that's what he says here he will rejoice over you with gladness there's a daytime program on television which I sometimes record so I can watch it afterwards called the repair shop so if you probably know it there's skilled craft people in this repair shop and you'll find people coming in with all sorts of objects that have seen better days some of them really pretty badly neglected or badly worn or just not working and whether it's a clock or a child's toy whatever it is they leave it there and of course the workman the craftsman gets to work on it but it's a great moment always just near the end of the program when those who've brought in however long it's taken obviously sometimes months but they're filmed coming to the workshop and the person who's been in charge of repairing the object and polishing it up or whatever it's all there on the table but it's covered with a cloth and there's that great moment when the person comes back and really excited at getting this object back and wondering what it's now looking like compared to what it was like when he took it in or she took it in and the craftsman just lifts up the cloth away and you know both his face or her face and the face of the person that took it in have a magnificent expression of joy it's joy meeting together in that finished product the joy of the person who took it in to be repaired and is now almost invariably surprised at just how good it is and the joy of the craftsman who rejoices seeing the joy in the other person's face and gets satisfaction from knowing that he's done a good job and that he's brought satisfaction and joy to the person who owns it well how much more is it the case with God when you sit at his table and I appeal to anyone here who doesn't come to his table and should and know that they should it's for you it's for you with your God will you deny bringing God further rejoicing by not being there with his people and when you sit at that table and you realize that God rejoices in you that you are a product of his own redemptive creative ability then you can rejoice in him as he rejoices in you or in us together because it's a collective thing so God's residency

[24 : 59] God's rejoicing and then finally God's resting when you come to this part verse 17 he will quiet you by his love is how it's translated here the translations have that too the older translations he will rest in his love and the word that's used in Hebrew can mean to rest or to keep silent which is why you've got these two possible ways of translating it he will keep silent or he will rest here is he and in fact here it's it's put that he will quiet you by his love as people instead of being agitated instead of what they knew of before he is going to bring and to be quietened by his love now that's not how I prefer to look at it personally I think it fits better with the context which is really about God God residing God rejoicing and so it seems to make better sense that this is a reference to God like the old translation as well has it he will rejoice over you he will rest in his love that it's

God's resting God resting in his people rather than they being quiet and not coming to be at rest in him although that of course is true so if we take it that way as best referring to God himself there's an analogy here also with his creation which really was one of the things that persuaded me that this is how we should really translate this phrase in Hebrew because when you go back to the old to the in the Old Testament to the beginning of Genesis the account of the creation what do you find there you find in chapter one that after the creation has been completed it says that God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good he took satisfaction in it he knew it was good he couldn't do a better well we should never say he couldn't do of God but it was indeed perfect as it came from his hand but then in the next part the beginning of chapter two of

Genesis what do you read there you read that he sanctified he rested on the seventh day and sanctified it the two things come together he beheld his work he looked at his work he looked at the creation it was very good and he rested from all his work that he had made on the seventh day and he sanctified in other words you have a pattern God creates God creates something perfect God takes satisfaction and God rests in it the rest of satisfaction and surely that's the case when you come to salvation as well here's the mighty one he has gone out as a warrior he has defeated our enemies he has brought them into his captivity he has brought into being salvation for us he has brought us into the possession of salvation now that it's completed in Jesus Christ part of course from Christ's coming to crown it but in principle through the cross of Christ and his resurrection that salvation is complete everything is there in it what does God do he looks at it and says it's good so he rests in his people he comes to take delight in his love in his people he will rejoice over them he will rest in his love resting in them as it were in his love as he settles upon them you think of resting in that sense a complete satisfaction in Christ and his people as they're joined together in the salvation and that's too something that's so important it is in his love that God rests in his love as it has provided salvation for us and as that is true and as we realize that God is resident and God rejoices so God rests he says

I am satisfied in the work of my hands I am satisfied in the death of my son I am satisfied in his resurrection I am satisfied in his exaltation I am satisfied in his ongoing intercession for my people there is nothing about him that dissatisfies me therefore he rests in his love settles upon his people and says I have everything I need everything I required in this relationship of Jesus and my people and that too applies to the Lord's supper doesn't it because when you come and sit at that table and partake of these elements not only are you aware of God's residency that God dwells in the midst of his people and that he rejoices in his people that he rejoices over them with gladness but he also takes satisfaction in them he's pleased to have them as his people they give him delight as his saved people he rests in his love and isn't it true of us too that it's in our love for him that we rest in him isn't it really something that we recognize as so different to the hearts that we once had to the way our soul once was and its restlessness without

God isn't that the reason for Augustine's great statement thou hast made us for thyself and our soul can find no rest until we find our rest in thee when you come to find your rest in God your satisfaction in God and your satisfaction with the fact that God has satisfaction in you then you know what spiritual moral rest is and that resting of God and the resting of his people come together once again in love at the Lord's table as we read in the likes of the passage we find in Song of Solomon chapter 2 verses 3 and 4 where this is the beloved's spouse which he's talking about our beloved as we come to think about the Lord's supper and sitting under the provision that he's made for us and sitting with him and enjoying him and being enjoyed by him at his table as the apple tree among the trees of the forest so as my beloved among the young men with great delight I sat in his shadow and his fruit was sweet to my taste he brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love our saving satisfied singing

[32 : 41] God what a great God and great salvation may he bless his word to us let's conclude this evening singing in Psalm 148 Psalm 148 the sing psalms version on page 194 and if we sing verses 1 to 4 the first stanza and then verses 11 to 14 so that's three stanzas verses 1 to 4 and then the final two stanzas from verse 11 praise him from heaven's height all angels give him praise praise him you hosts of light praise him sun moon and stars on high you highest heavens and cloudy sky and then from verse 11 to God's praise praise him praise oh praise the lord praise him from heaven's height all angels give him praise praise him you hosts of light praise him sun moon and stars on high you highest timbs and cloudy sky all nations and earth kings princes and all who reign young men and maidens too both children and old men the lord's great name by them be praised his name alone on highest rest his glory shines abroad above the earth and them and he do his own folk a mighty king has killed let his cry out his praise to

God they are his people praise the lord i'll go to the side door this evening now may the grace of the lord jesus christ the love of god the father and the communion of the holy spirit be with you now and evermore amen