

Understanding Gods will

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[0 : 00] take our reading from Zephaniah. And this may be one of those books which you've not turned to that often. In fact, anyone read Zephaniah in the last year?

Oh, look at Linda. Linda, it doesn't surprise me a bit. So Zephaniah is a tricky book to find. It's probably easier if you start at the back of the Old Testament and make your way backwards this way.

And it's near Haggai. It comes after, let's see what it comes after. It comes after Habakkuk, yeah, and before Haggai. So in between the two pages.

So Robert Murray McShane, which many of you would have heard of, I always refer to him because a lot of people don't know that he died very young, but he also entered into ministry reasonably young as well.

I would suggest, you know, if you're going into full-time ministry, that you have to be at least over 25, possibly nearer 30 than anything.

[1 : 21] It's just, and I also think it would help that if you actually, if I can put it this way, did a real job in the world before you went into ministry. You've got to learn how to pay bills and work and find work and stuff like that.

But Robert Murray McShane taught and preached and prayed, and he left the church that he was in, and revival broke out.

And he went to another church, and he left that church, and revival broke out. I mean, can you imagine the kind of discouragement that you might have, but, you know, what a person sows, another generation reaps.

And then he died very young, but he had a very strict reading program where you read so many old passages during the day, so many New Testament passages during the day, and what you would end up doing is you'd end up, in the course of a year, reading the whole Bible once, the New Testament twice, and the Psalms twice.

And it was quite a, it didn't seem like a lot if you spread it out over the course of a day, but you learned how to read the Bible. And I'm pretty sure that if you typed in Murray McShane reading, Bible reading program, there's bound to be one on the internet somewhere.

[2 : 42] If you wanted to copy that. But it's like, it's no more than probably, I guess some passages are longer than others.

So on some days, you're only reading for about 20 minutes, and other days, you may be reading for about 40 minutes. Slowly, that is. But it's a wonderful reading program.

And of course, when you do reading programs, and read the Bible throughout the year, you kind of get familiar as to where books of the Bible are. So in one case, you'll know that you've read at least Zephaniah once a year.

So we're going to be picking that up in chapter three, but we're going to begin at verse nine. And we're going to read through to the end of the chapter. So just to give you, put it in its context, Zephaniah is speaking about, to the people of God, about what God is going to do in the future. So let's hear it from verse nine. Now hear God's word. For at that time, I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord, and serve him with one accord.

[3 : 57] From beyond the rivers to Cush, my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring an offering. On that day, you shall not be put to shame, because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me.

For then I will remove from your midst your proudly exalted ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain.

But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord, those who are left in Israel. They shall do no injustice and speak no lies.

Nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid. Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion, shout, O Israel, rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

The Lord has taken away the judgments against you. He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst. You shall never again fear evil, and on that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear not, O Zion, let not your hands grow weak.

[5 : 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. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.

Behold, at that time I will deal with your oppressors, and I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.

At that time I will bring you in, at that time when I gather you together, for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth.

When I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord. Well, may God add the blessing to his word as we listen, hear, and take it in in a moment.

[6 : 18] But before we come back to that word, let's stand and sing. Okay, if you could turn again to Zephaniah, if you're there.

Wonderful. And for those of you who are younger listening to this, there's going to be a few key things to really pay attention to, and they're what I would call the non-negotiables.

In other words, in all of God's creation, over all of time, these things will never change. And if you're a young person growing up in this world, you really need to learn these and take them into your heart.

And if you're someone who's older than, you know, as young as some of the youngest here, then you also need to remember them at least, or at least learn them for the first time.

But the non-negotiables are the things that give us a sense of hope and a sense of constance so that we are not ebbing and flowing as though we're not knowing where we're going to be next.

[7 : 24] And this is really important. So let me just read again to you verse 9, verse 9, which speaks, of course, of the day of great reversal.

And it says, For at that time I will change the speech of peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord.

Well, let's pray for God's blessing upon us and the reading this morning. Father God, we ask in your name that you would bless us and keep us, that you would look after us this day, and that we would be able to read and understand your word and knowing that it is good seed sown, it is life, it is light, and it is the necessary food that we need to be filled and fulfilled in this present time.

We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for the time that we can remember the importance of his birth and what his birth led to. We ask, Father God, this morning that you would bless and keep us all as we worship you now in your word.

In Jesus' name. Amen. So before I get to laying down these non-negotiable principles, which are going to be really important for all of us, especially for those young growing up, I want us to identify one thing about God that's really important, and that is that when we know God, we know God through his character.

[8 : 59] That knowing God means that we know him through his character, and his character includes qualities, virtues like holiness. So when we say that we know God, we have a sense of his holiness.

And when we say that we know God, we have a sense of his righteousness. And when we say we know God, we also have a sense that he is intolerant towards sin.

That makes up God's character. They're not the only things that make up God's character, because there are other things like grace and mercy, which we know primarily, and most importantly, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We see the grace of God in Christ Jesus. We see the mercy of God in the cross. And we see the love of God in the cross of Christ as well.

And the cross of Christ is probably the best example that makes clear God's virtues and his qualities and his character, because there we see the righteous judgment of God, the hatred of sin, and yet grace and mercy in the forgiveness of sinners.

[10:10] So when you say you know God, and when you say that you have a personal walk with God, or when you say that you are spending time and your life is devoted to God, what you are actually saying, or you ought to realize, is that your devotion is to one who is holy and just and righteous, and who is intolerant towards sin.

And this is the God that we belong to this morning. Now there's one other thing to notice. And that is, given that it's Christmas, we recognize that we remember and celebrate the birth of Christ. But we remember and celebrate the birth of Christ in a very particular way, because we do it with our eye on the future. That we look at what the birth of Christ led to, how it led to his life, how it led to his ministry, and then ultimately how it led to the cross, and then after the cross, the resurrection, and then after the resurrection, the ascension, and then after the ascension, the glorification, in what we see in the book of Revelation.

But down here on earth, we have the great day of Pentecost, the day when God reverses the speech of his people, and people begin to call upon the name of the Lord.

And many people believe, which I think is a very good understanding of Zechariah, sorry, Zephaniah 3 verse 9, is that the time at which God changes the speech of the people is really speaking about the day when Babel was reversed.

[11:51] Now we all know the story of Babel. The people of the earth decided to build a tower against God and become God for themselves, and God had to come down and he destroyed the tower.

But in destroying the tower, he also gave people a different language so nobody could understand each other. But Pentecost, Pentecost is where nobody can understand each other because all of a sudden everyone's understanding each other in the same language.

That's biblical tongues. It's the reversal of Babel. It is the sign that God, through Christ, is undoing the curse and giving a hope for the future.

And so, though Zephaniah doesn't mention anything about Christmas because he wouldn't, in fact, when Jesus was born, there was no mention of Christmas. It establishes what we know about the importance of Jesus Christ coming.

Zechariah, sorry, Zephaniah calls us this morning to appreciate and understand the character of God. That God is this.

[12:57] He is a table-turning God. He is able to restore and reverse the conditions that people live within. He was able to do that in the past.

He was able to do that in the very past. And he's able to do that in the present and in the future. And the reason why this is important is because God is in control of all things and you really need to understand that.

So here's the first principle. Whatever is, is the will of God. Whatever is, is the will of God. But this needs explaining, doesn't it?

And it needs explaining because we do not want our hope for the future to be diminished because it can't be in one sense but we need to understand why it can't.

So who remembers the story of Jesus in the boat with his disciple and the wind and the waves? Well in that story you will know that God uses on purpose the wind and the waves to expose the disciples and to exalt Jesus Christ in his authority.

[14:04] That God is not just in Jesus Christ stopping the wind and the waves by commanding them with a word but God is the one who actually sent the wind and the waves in the first place.

And as God sent these wind the wind and the waves the disciples cry out to Jesus do you not care that we are perishing showing to Jesus their lack of faith in him only for Jesus then to stand up and command the wind and the waves to be still showing the disciples who is this that can calm the wind and the waves that God through the same thing the wind and the waves exposes the lack of faith in the disciples and the authority that Jesus has over the wind and the waves.

And the point here to learn is that God controls every up and every down every every high wave every low trough God controls it all and he uses it to do multiple things.

we would use the phrase to kill two birds with one stone this is what God is doing and God is doing this in a very particular way throughout all of history that he uses events highs and lows ins and

outs ups and downs to teach God's people different things in different ways and therefore though God never changes the way you experience God will always change and that's the first thing to appreciate this morning that God is the same yesterday today and forever God will never change but your experience of God will always change because sometimes you'll experience God with the wind and the waves and sometimes you'll experience God in the calming of the wind and the waves it's the same God the same yesterday today and forever but you are not the same and because you are not the same day after day after day what God brings into your life through the peaks and the troughs exposes things in you which need to change and also brings you to the realization that Christ is the only one who can change those things that need to change now this is the beauty of Christ this is the hope that

Zephaniah is speaking of that is going to come one day to the people of God so God uses everything every peak and every trough every high wave and every low wave God uses them all to accomplish multiple things at one time and therefore you must never think if you leave this room today that there are things that are happening to you that God is not in control of or more importantly that God hasn't even sent God sends it all and it's important that you appreciate that because then you begin to realize that your life is to respond to God faithfully in whatever it is that you're dealing with that you can never be out of the will of God you can only ever be faithful or unfaithful in the will of God because the wind and the waves are God's will what they do is they expose our faithfulness or unfaithfulness you can never be in or out impossible it's not as if [17:28] God's will is happening over here but it's not happening over there nowhere in scripture would you ever get that impression or that idea or you might get that idea but it's not a reflection of what scripture teaches nevertheless what is true is whether or not you are faithful or unfaithful within that will just like the disciples in the boat are they responding faithfully in faith or are they responding without faith and of course the example given is that they are responding without faith do you not care that we are perishing and Jesus has to say to them oh you of little faith and then he calms the winds and the waves so that's really important the first principle to remember you can never be in or out of the will of God you're always in it the question is whether or not you're responding faithfully or unfaithfully within his will well here's the summary and it's a short summary of what Zephaniah is saying in that context

God's people are being reassured that while the present doesn't look that great the future is going to look wonderful and therefore there is this optimism but it's not a it's not an unbiblical optimism it is a it is a hope filled promise that what is going to come to these people is a God who's able to reverse the conditions that they live within he's able to turn the table he's able to bring blessing where there is no blessing he's able to bring down those who are exalted and lift up those who are humble this is what Zephaniah is proclaiming that God will do in fact if you look to 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 exalt over you with loud singing this is what God not only will do but more importantly that you understand he can do so as you look out into a whole new year and you wonder what's ahead of you understand this that whatever is ahead of you whatever is ahead of you is the will of

God whatever is ahead of you is the will of God the question this morning is will you respond faithfully to that will or will you will you live in hope of that will and respond faithfully or will you be like the disciples who still need to learn certain lessons to know who God is so it is not the case that God is somehow different with you it's not as if God's character ebbs and flows like our character does you know sometimes you catch yourself as parents when you're trying to bring up children and you realize that you want your children to obey your mood not your character well God never wants you to obey his mood he doesn't have moods he doesn't have mood swings he is constant he is perfect he is beautiful he is wonderful he never says to his children obey my mood because God isn't moody his character is constant and that beauty of God allows us to be able to rest in the fact that whatever is happening I may experience different things but I may experience different things from a God who never changes who is constant the same yesterday today and forever and the reason why that's true is because we're the ones who need to change we're the ones where the tables have to be turned we're the ones who need the conditions of our life being reversed we're the ones who need the conditions of our surroundings being reversed and the constant God changes us who are changeable and this is how and why we can be hopeful in the future nothing is beyond God's reach nothing is out of God's touch nothing is going to carry on as though God is not involved

in it now for those of you who are consciously sensitive to the times you're living in will understand that the church over these last couple of years all but has gone through a turbulent time it would seem but we must not think that something is happening to the church that God is not in control of or God didn't ordain in the first place

God's people always need refining and it just so happens to be that God uses the world in which we live to refine his people he uses the world in which we live to bring about the blessings that we will receive in the future and he uses that to cultivate in our hearts a sense of faithfulness towards God that we may not currently have as I said Zephaniah doesn't mention Christmas but he does mention the great day which is not possible unless Christ comes the day in which the tables are turned the day in which fortunes are restored the day in which blessings come is not possible without the birth of Christ coming and we know that the birth of Christ causes all of these things so if you think you're waiting a long time think how long the people in

[23 : 17] Zephaniah's day were waiting how long they prayed how long they sang how long they had to wait for Christ to come and we live on the other side of Christ where he has come and we're still being told the same things because the same things hold true today as they did in Zephaniah's day what Zephaniah is giving the people through what he's teaching is a hope that cannot fade perish die or be destroyed it is a hope that transcends every failure it is a hope that transcends every good day it is a hope that allows us to see that whatever is happening in the world it can never take away the hope which is based in the promises that God has made his people made to those who especially worship him and know that hope through worship now what's important here principle number two children and adults as well is a non-negotiable is what you sow you will reap that what you sow you will also reap it is a non-negotiable that will never change and therefore the reason why you need to understand this is because some people when they are older wonder why an apple tree has appeared in their garden and the answer cannot be found yesterday and it cannot be found last year it can only be found many years ago when someone decided to plant the seed in the ground and therefore if you're wondering why certain things are appearing in your life years after certain things were sown it is because that is the way that God has ordered the world not everything is as quick as it appears to be now we know how these things work

I've often stood in the swimming center and you have one of those drinks machines and you put your pound in and you have to type in a number and you get to choose whether it's a chocolate bar you want or a can of drink and you push in the number and immediately the can comes out or the chocolate bar comes out that's a very basic form of sowing and reaping you put in and you get out but in God's world people got to be very careful about what they sow in their lives because they will not reap that until years down the line and some people wonder why things are turning up in their lives years after they have been faithful and it is because years before they were unfaithful and you cannot overcome the consequences of what you have sown God will not be mocked what a person sows that will he also reap and so when people have things turning up in their lives they would rather not have it is not because of what they did yesterday or the year before it's often what they did months before or many years before because God has ordered the world in such a way that what people sow they will also reap and that's why the future looks the way that it does okay that's why the future looks the way that it does and in that future because of the mess that often people have created

God reverses those conditions because without God we're going to have things growing that we don't want so God comes along in Christ Jesus and cuts those things away so that we may grow in faithfulness towards him God is the only one who can reverse the consequences and the conditions of what was sown years earlier God is the only one who can bring about the future blessing in Christ Jesus because without him if I can put it this way nothing really grows or flourishes and so how is it possible to have a hope how is it possible to have a hope especially winter time where everything is dark and cold and nothing seems to be growing well because hope is not based in the current condition of the world or the current conditions of your life it is based in God who can reverse those conditions in a moment you see for us we have sowing and reaping for God he can change things in a moment because he is God but we are not and so the reason we cry out to God the reason we can be so hopeful for the future really hopeful for the future is because we believe in a God and belong to a God who can reverse the conditions of his people even in a world where it looks like nothing is growing it's cold it's dark it's winter it's beyond hope the world may be beyond hope but God isn't and we belong to God so let me finish with this why can you be hopeful

well the hope that God gives you doesn't die it doesn't perish it cannot be destroyed it can never be taken away from you but you can lose the sense of it if you take your eyes off God the hope that God gives transcends all temporal things whether they are good things or bad things the hope of God transcends them all and those promises that Zephaniah is speaking of here that is going to come to God's people is something that people have to wait for hopefully and the hope is a certainty it is not a wishful thinking as though better days will come simply because they must be because we've had so many bad days no better days will come because

God will bring them and so what Zephaniah is causing the people of God to do here is to take their eyes off their present condition and to look up to God who's able to change their present condition and most importantly that they do not ignore the will of God that whatever is whatever wave comes whatever wind blows that is God's will and it is testing you to see whether or not you're responding faithfully or unfaithfully because you can never be in God's will or out of God's will and it's not as if God's will happens over here but not over there I don't understand what kind of world that is it sounds like to me that that's the type of world where God is not really in control of anything but just has a little influence perhaps in one area so Zephaniah verse 14 says sing aloud sing aloud oh daughter of Zion shout oh Israel rejoice and exult with all your heart oh daughter of Jerusalem you this morning are called to sing go sing aloud and if they were told to sing years before Jesus came and where all the promises are fulfilled how much more can we sing in the light of

[31 : 02] Jesus having come we are winning in the world even when we are losing in the world and if that sounds like dry water like an oxymoron it is because that God's ways are not our ways that God turns the world upside down well here's the exhortation your hope is not in the world and it's not in what you can imagine will happen in the future but it's rather in a God who can do anything in the future he so pleases to do and just like those in Zephaniah's day we are to be the same today and just like those in the days with Jesus with his disciples we are to be the same today or at least we are to realize the same things that God uses because of his namesake every wind and every wave to refine his people every wind and every wave to make us more like

Jesus nothing is wasted for God and nothing is wasted because of what God will make you to be God will save you the mighty one will save and he will rejoice with you with gladness he will quiet you by his love meaning that the peace that you seek is a peace that can only be given the peace that you seek is not a peace that you can work for it is not a peace that you can bring about by yourself it has to be given and it is promised to be given by God who loves his people and so Christian sing aloud leave singing you have no reason but to sing you have nothing else to do other than sing in the glorious hope that God has given you so I don't know what next year looks like for any of you but I can tell you this whatever comes will be

God's will Amen Amen Well let's stand and sing joy to the world before we close in prayer now I hear the blessing of the Lord as you leave may the Lord bless you and keep you may the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace Amen Lord come cuánt they bring me Thank you.

Thank you.