

**Zephaniah 3:14-20**

**14 Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15 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. 16 On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. 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. 18 I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. 19 Behold, at that time I will deal with all 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. 20 At that time I will bring you in, at the 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.**

**This Is God's Word. Thanks be to God.**

Well, good morning Redeemer. My name is Aaron Reyes, and I am one of the Deacons that serves here at our church. If this is your first-time visiting Redeemer and you would like to know what we are doing, we are currently celebrating the season of Advent. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Advent, Advent is the first season of the Christian year, leading up to Christmas. It is a season that awakens the angst of waiting, longing, and yearning for Christ. Advent is the perfect season for you and your family to still your hearts before God and focus your affections on Christ.

During this Advent season, we have been looking at a number of classic texts from the OT to help us better understand the meaning of Christmas. Today we come to the book of Zephaniah. This is perhaps one of the lesser known passages in the OT. When people think about the Christmas season, it's not often that we think about the book of Zephaniah. Now if we could put the main idea of this book into one sentence, we could say that Zephaniah is telling us that, **the promised 'Day of The Lord' is coming, and on that day, Jesus Christ will establish justice, he will fulfill our joy, and he will secure our restoration.**

### The Day of The Lord

Now, let's talk about 'The Day of The Lord.' 'The Day of The Lord' is often referred to as Judgment Day. If you have been in church for any amount of time, chances are you've probably heard a sermon or two on Judgment Day or the coming 'Day of The Lord.' Even if you haven't been in church your whole life, you've probably heard of Judgment Day somewhere. Whether it's, you know, depictions of a man in the street holding up a sign that says "Repent! The End Is Near! Judgment Day Is Coming! Or maybe you watched Terminator 2: Judgment Day. That movie has nothing to do with this passage. Judgment day is a very well-known theme in pop-culture. And depending on your religious upbringing, Judgment Day may or may not have played an important role in your faith. And what I mean by that is that if you grew up in the church, you might have heard a lot about Judgment Day, or maybe you didn't hear about it at all. And I think that is because, when it comes to Judgement Day, the Church has tended to swing towards the issue, where it's like all they talk about, or, like a pendulum, the Church will swing away from the issue and really never talks about it. So, one side says, we don't want to talk about Judgment Day, because it will just scare people off, and God is love. He accepts me as I am. Love wins right? The other side is usually all hell, fire, and brimstone all the time. These are obviously caricatures, but often this is the case.

So, when I was a kid, I attended a Christian Halloween production. This production was called 'Hell House.' 'Hell House' was an evangelistic haunted house aimed to force the issue of Final Judgment in people's minds. It was a lot like the old production 'Heavens Gates, Hell's Flames.' I don't know if you've ever heard of that, but 'Hell House' was more of an interactive

form of that, but set in a haunted house. Meaning, you could walk through it, you could smell things, hear things, see things, run away from things.

Now what I remember most vividly about 'Hell House' was there were several very graphic depictions of violence, suicide, drug abuse, and things of that nature. So, when you came to towards the end of 'Hell House' you ended up in hell, obviously, since that's the name of the production right? Hell was set in this dark room where actors were screaming as they were being tortured in the corner by people dressed as demons. There was red and fire everywhere. Lots of smoke, and well the big climax of hell house was when Satan came out. Satan comes out and says, "This is what will happen to you if you don't accept Christ into your heart tonight!" And at the very end of 'Hell House,' they lead you to the back room where a volunteer would sit you down and ask you, "If you were to die tonight do you know where you would go? Would you like to accepted Christ into your heart?" As you can imagine everyone raised their hands even though half of us were already Christians. The sales pitch from hell house was this: *If you were terrified of what you just saw, imagine how much worse the real hell will be. Accept Christ as your savior and he will save you from these torments.*

Now, that's obviously belief by intimidation, right? Well, a lot of people could read the book of Zephaniah and make that same argument. You see, Zephaniah is living at a time when God's people are divided, and though they may be a very religious people, they are largely ignoring God. It is a dark time, and things are about to get a lot worse. It is at this moment that Zephaniah reminds God's people that Judgment Day is coming.

Listen to Zephaniah himself explain Judgement Day in Chapter 1:15: "15 A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and

gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness,". So, there is this level of fear involved when Zephaniah explains what 'The Day of the Lord' will be like, but one thing that should be said about this book is this - I don't think it's fear mongering. I don't think the aim of Zephaniah message is to scare people into repentance like 'Hell House,' or something like that. The reason we can say this is because of today's passage.

Zephaniah might start out very bleak, and it does warn people that "The Day of The Lord" is a day of distress and anguish, but throughout the book, there are hints that in the midst of the coming Judgment of God, there is hope. Not only is there hope but there is tangible joy that can be experienced right now. This passage indicates that there is a beauty of God that can lead us to repentance. This is what the book of Zephaniah does so well. It balances the themes of God's Justice and God's Mercy, and in between these themes lies the hope of our restoration. Judgment Day is coming. God will punish sin, but within that judgment there is hope.

So, what does this have to do with Advent? I believe this has everything to do with Advent, in that this passage gives us a distinct answer to the questions of what should be done. How should we respond knowing that Judgment Day is coming? Knowing that Christ is coming to judge the living and the dead? You see Advent is a time where we remember God has come to us in Christ Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor. To build up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and to free prisoners who are bound. So, we as God's people are caught in this tension between Christ's first coming, and his second coming. And the question that should be asked is what do we do? How do we live in this tension as a faithful and repentant remnant of God?

So, what we are going to do for the rest of our time today is we are going to look at this passage, and we are going to see the good news and the hope that is found in the coming 'Day of the Lord', and we are going to ask, what does this point us to? We're going to break this passage down into three main points. The points are The promise of pardon | the promise of praise | and the promise of restoration.

### 1. The Promise of Pardon.

14 Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies.

So, the Day of The Lord is coming, but for those who turn and repent, this day is not to be seen as a day of dread, but a day of rejoicing and a day of singing. I love how this call to sing and shout and rejoice isn't presented as a suggestion but as a command of God. God doesn't say, "It would be nice if you could sing. You might even shout! You have the option to rejoice if you would like." When God commands us to do something, it is always for good reason. In this case, the command to rejoice is because God has taken away our Judgments.

As a worship leader, I'm constantly baffled by how a lot of the worship music that has come out over the last few decades tend to be very thin. What I mean by that is there are a number of worship songs that lack the gravity of the power and majesty of God in the forgiveness of sin. Some worship songs don't mention sin or grace at all. I believe that true gospel worship, the kind of rejoicing that is mentioned in this passage, happens when our conscious is awakened to the reality of our sin, and the grace of God in forgiving our sin. This is one of the more fundamental reasons why God is worthy of our praise.

Many of you are familiar with a famous hymn we sing here at Redeemer called 'It Is Well,' but many of you may not know the story behind that famous hymn. 'It Is Well' was written by Horatio Spafford. Horatio Spafford was a well-respected lawyer and devout Presbyterian church elder living in Chicago in the year 1871. Horatio Spafford was married and had four daughters. After a great fire devastated the city of Chicago in 1871, the Spafford family decided to sail to Europe, but at the last-minute Horatio was pulled away because of business and his wife and four daughters decided to sail on without him.

Well as it turned out the ship never made it to Europe because their ship had slammed into another boat in the middle of this massive storm. Horatio received a telegram later from his wife saying "Saved alone, what shall I do?" All four daughters drowned that night. The hymn 'It Is Well' was a response to that tragic event.

The reason I bring this is up because is because one of my favorite verses in that song says, "My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought My sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul." One thing that's always amazed me about that verse is why after such a tragic event, would someone be singing about God pardoning their sin? A lot of us would never consider making that connection, but he did because he knew that true joy comes when you gaze at the amazing truth of God's grace.

If you want to know the secret to having joy in the midst of tragic pain, it's this, that our sins are pardoned by God. God has taken away the judgment against us. This is why we rejoice; this is why we shout, this is why we sing. This promise of God pardoning our sin delivers both an ever-present joy and a future anticipation of the fulfillment of our joy. The more we gaze at this

truth we will begin to understand why God commands us to rejoice. This should move our hearts to worship because this means that judgment is not God's last word for his people.

Now, a lot of people might have an issue with believing in a God who judges people, but I believe N.T Wright, a well-known OT scholar, said it best when he said that the results of God taking away our judgments isn't simply that we get to go to heaven after we die. There is truth to that, but also, it shows us that a big reason God takes away our judgments is so that He can come and dwell in our midst (paraphrased). If God is going to live in our midst, we need purification; we need God to take away our judgments which leads us then to point #2.

## 2. The Promise of Praise

The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. 16 On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. 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.

Just a quick note, I've been sitting on this text for nearly a year. Just reading it and meditating on it, and after months of sitting on this text, it has become more and more evident to me that these two verses, verses 16 and 17 are some of my favorite verses in the entire Bible. O. Palmer Robertson calls these verses "The John 3:16 of the OT." The significance of these verses and the implication of these verses are so powerful.

You see, God calls upon His people to sing and rejoice in verse 14. Then in verse 17, it is God who sings and rejoices over them. Stop and think about that. Have you ever thought about this? I mean sure, we know the power of God's voice. God created the heavens, the earth, and the cosmos by speaking. Here, God is singing. Now, remember, this is a picture, right? Zephaniah is prophesying about a day that has not yet come, but when that day comes, God will be singing. This shows us that our God is not some far off distant deity that doesn't care for

us. Our God is near. He is a mighty one who will save. He will personally rejoice over you with gladness. He will exalt over you with loud singing. The Lord your God will do this! He will quiet you with His love.

One of the more beautiful things I've been able to experience since becoming a parent has been being able to hear my wife sing to our son. When Amos was first born he cried a lot because that's what babies do. So, what my wife Betty would do to calm him down would be to rock him back to sleep by singing a song over him. And it worked! I've tried this; it doesn't work with me! Kind of makes me wonder why I do what I do for a living. So, when Betty sings over our son, she quiets him with her love.

So, imagine that. Imagine a mother singing over her child, assuring her child on her presence. Now imagine being in the presence of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, The Alpha, and the Omega, The Beginning and The End. Imagine being in His presence and hearing Him sing a song of immeasurable comfort over you. It really is hard to imagine that, but this is the image that Zephaniah is painting for us. This is what 'The Day of The Lord' will bring for God's people. The very presence of God alone is enough to make us feel safe, but when God sings over us, He's not just wanting to keep us quiet, He is wanting to bless us with his love.

The secret to everlasting joy is found in the assurance of God's love resting upon us, rejoicing over us. I don't think it is an accident that at the beginning of our story God speaks. He speaks creation into existence, and at the end of our story, God sings. He sings a song of victory. The song that God will sing over His people is a song of His mighty power to forgive us of our sins. His ability to take our judgments away. His ability to save us from our enemies. His ability



to bless us with his love. When the 'Day of the Lord' comes, the song God will sing over us is a song of redemption. That leads us to our last point — the promise of restoration.

### 3. The Promise of Restoration

18 I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. 19 Behold, at that time I will deal with all 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. 20. At that time, I will bring you in, at the 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.

Now, remember, this passage that we're looking at deals with the hope of the future. It deals with a future hope that God Himself will accomplish. So, before we can begin to ask the question – what does this mean for us? We need to remember the book of Zephaniah was written to a specific group of people who were in a specific situation. This promise of the future was written for the people of Judea to help them face their situation. So, we have to understand why Zephaniah wrote this to the people of Judah. Now the people of Judah were facing oppression from outside threats. Mainly from Babylon. Their social institutions were beginning to fail; their temples were being used for idol worship, and on top of all that God was threatening to bring judgment against them. Things were not good. So, if you can imagine, if you were a citizen of Judea, what you might have felt like to hear Zephaniah end his prophetic ministry with a word of hope. With a word of promise. The last word that he says to God's people are words of God's faithfulness.

Some months ago, my wife and I were able to watch the movie 'Darkest Hour.' The movie was about Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister who led the United Kingdom as Nazi forces were closing in on them. The movie offered insights and details about the tough

decisions that needed to be made in a time of serious crisis. It was up to Winston Churchill to decide between surrendering to Hitler, or fighting against impossible odds.

One of the more moving parts of the film was the famous speech he gave towards the end of the movie. Churchill knew that the fate of the British empire laid in his ability to rouse the nation. It laid on his ability to instill hope in the people. I love this speech for many reasons. It's very moving, but what most amazed me about this speech was that Churchill was speaking to people who were about to go through a possible invasion. An invasion they were sure to lose. He had to give them a word of hope and word of confident boldness that if they were to fight, they could win. He had to convince an entire nation of this. I just want to read to you a small portion of that speech.

“We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.”

Very moving, right? Now I can't help but imagine that if I were a British citizen living during this time, and I knew all the details, and I knew the odds were against us, I probably would have been like, “yeah, are you sure about this?” That's because no one knows the future. The hope that Churchill gave wasn't set in stone. What hope is set in stone? No one can be sure of anything, right?

Well, Zephaniah was speaking to a people who were about to go through terrible circumstances. He saw it coming, and yet he chose to end his book with a word of future hope — future glory. The hope that Zephaniah prophesied about was a hope that God would deal

with their oppressors. That He would save the lame and gather the outcast. A hope that God would restore their fortunes. This was not a hope that was based on mere wishful thinking. Zephaniah was stating this as if it were a sure thing. He was saying you can cash this in. God is making a promise to you, and God is faithful in keeping His promises.

So, let me ask you a question. What are you facing? What are you about to face? Look, whatever it is, the faithfulness of God in keeping his promises will enable you to face it. If you hear these words and truly believe that God can turn your shame into praise, if you believe that, if you give your life to that, if you put all your weight on that branch, the promise is that your future is glorious. Now how is this possible? How can this be true?

Well, 621 years after Zephaniah's prophecy, Jesus Christ, the God son would be born in the town of Bethlehem. Unto us a Child would be born, unto us, a Son would be given, and the government would be on His shoulder. And His name would be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace, there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with *judgment and justice* for all eternity. The reason we can have hope in God's fulfillment to His promises is because a big part of His promise has already been fulfilled.

You see on the cross; we see both God's judgment and God's mercy, we see the wrath of God and the love of God being met in one person. What do I mean by that? On the cross we see God's judgment coming down on His Son. We see the wrath of God that was meant for you being poured out on Jesus. We see the mercy of God in Christ substituting himself for our punishment. We see the love in taking away our Judgment. This is the hope. This is what Zephaniah was pointing his readers to. When we talk about hope, we not talking about a

feeling, or a symbolism when we talk about hope. We are talking about a person. We are talking about Jesus.

The hope that the Christian faith describes doesn't end with Jesus's death. You see a big part of the Christian faith is that Jesus defeated death. He walked out of the tomb alive. He ascended to the Father. The hope of our future restoration lays in the hope of Christ's resurrection. If Christ died in our place, the promise is that we died with him. If Christ rose from the dead, the promise is that we too will one day rise. He will turn our shame into praise, and he will restore our fortunes before our eyes. The hope of Advent is that we rejoice that Christ has come, we praise God for being in our midst, and we wait with eager longing for his return.

So, Redeemer let us be a people who rejoice, for our God has taken away our judgments through His son Jesus. Let us be a people who are assured of the love of God, that a day is coming when He will sing over us, and let's be a people who radically hope for the restoration of all things through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Let's pray