

**Sunday, September 12, 2021**  
**Zephaniah 3:9-20 (Promises Kept)**  
**Pastor Eric Dubois**

**Intro**

Darryl read from Revelation 21:1-8. What we find in Revelation, we find in Zephaniah. Promises of a world where death and mourning and crying and pain are forever abolished, and God is dwelling among his people. What could be better than that? Is this the world you long for?

When you're struggling with cancer or being slandered or being rejected, don't these truths of a world without physical pain, a world where sins won't be committed against us, don't these truths bring comfort to your struggling soul? No death, no mourning, no crying, no pain. Does this move you to follow Jesus? Do God's promises of an end to your suffering inspire you to press on?

To that end we look to Zephaniah.

**READ PASSAGE**

**PRAY**

**Body**

**Passage Focus**

The realization of God's eternal plan. The realization of God's promises. The full realization of the redemption Jesus secured on the cross. That's what we're looking at this morning. "*At that time*", "*that day*" = the distant day of the LORD.

**Point 1: Reformation (3:9-10)**

**Explanation**

"*For at that time*" points back to verse eight. The day of the LORD is a day when:

- 1) Nations gathered
- 2) Wrath poured out
- 3) Universal effects (all the earth)

The speech of the peoples will be altered. Perhaps an allusion to the tower of Babel when God confused the speech of the peoples? God is the one who will do it. Their speech will now be pure = reformation of character. But why?

"That" indicates purpose. God reforms the peoples for two reasons. So that they'll "*call upon the name of the LORD.*" And so that they'll "*serve him with one accord.*" The picture is the peoples worshipping God in unified fellowship. Who are "*the peoples*"? Gentiles. Those who aren't Jewish. You and me for the most part. At the day of the LORD, Gentiles will be present worshipping the LORD.

Coinciding with Gentiles worshipping, Jewish exiles will return to their land to bring offerings. Cush likely = Nubia, modern day Sudan. Why is 3:10 a reference to Jews? These people are “the daughter of my dispersed ones” = Jews scattered from Israel throughout the nations. But not all Jews will be returning. Only those who are classified as “*my worshippers*.” A believing remnant.

The picture is a time when both Jews and Gentiles are worshipping the LORD. At a time when Gentiles are calling upon the name of the LORD and believing Jews are returning to the land, God is pouring his wrath out on all the earth because of their pride, rebellion, idolatry, oppression, deceit, etc.

### **Application**

God saves the nations in order to reform the nations. To free us from pride, rebellion, idolatry, oppression, deceit.

God saves us to free us from ourselves. To make us more like him. The fact that God reforms = hope for change in our hearts. Don’t despair thinking change is impossible. God wants to reform you, and if you’re born again, God is working in you. This is the gospel for today. There’s life to be lived right now! Our gospel hope certainly has future elements. We love Revelation 21! But gospel hope isn’t relegated to the future. The gospel says new hearts today, perfected hearts on the day of the LORD.

The reformation we experience today is a first fruits of a deeper reformation we’ll experience then.

### **Point 2: Removal (3:11-13)**

#### **Explanation**

Reformation gives way to removal. “*that day*” = the day of the LORD. No shame because:

- 1) Sin won’t exist (prideful removed...humble reformed)
- 2) No consequences from sin (no longer plundered by the nations)
- 3) Sins remembered no more

A certain quality of people will remain. Those who are “*humble and lowly*” = humble and lowly in relation to the LORD of the universe = faith like a child in Matthew. They once rebelled against God, expressing that rebellion with wicked deeds (3:11). But now they are humble and lowly. It looks like those that remain were reformed like the peoples of the nations. God is at work today changing sinners!

How will the humble and lowly conduct themselves on the holy mountain? “*They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD*” = God is the source of their protection = not foreign gods and nations. Look to the LORD for deliverance.

Are you anxious today? Seek God. Do you feel powerless to overcome a sinful pattern? Seek God. Are you confused about what to do? Seek God. Are you overwhelmed and discouraged? Look to God for strength!

*“they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue”* = no oppression and deceit and taking advantage of the widow, orphan, poor, or sojourner. Instead a people who love their neighbor. A people free from injustice. A people free from deceit.

*“For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”* That’s prosperity, peace, and no predators around.

Can you think of a place where the prideful will be removed, where those who remain won’t sin, and where all threats to one’s safety will be removed?

### **Application**

On the day of the LORD removal will take place. Humanity can be classified in one of two ways: humble or proud. Our response to God determines how God will deal with us on the day of the LORD. We’ll be removed in judgment. Or we’ll prosper in perfect peace and safety.

Two ways to live. Trust God and fear him or *“I am and there is no one else.”* I am the center of the universe. Everything and everyone exists for me. God’s will is irrelevant. Loving my neighbor only matters when it serves my interests. I must get my way no matter what it does to my marriage, my friendships, my church.

As believers we’re a mixture. We fear. We trust. We repent. But we’re tempted to act like we’re the center of the universe. We’re pulled in two directions.

### **Illustration**

Like a tug-of-war contest where two opposing teams are pulling on the rope, striving to overpower the other team. We are the rope. The opposing teams are the opposing desires in our heart. What will win out? Seeking my kingdom (*“I am and there is no one else”*) or seeking God’s kingdom (*“seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” ... “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”*).

It’s trust (God is good and trustworthy so his ways are best) and fear (a respect for God that doesn’t treat him casually and a healthy fear of hardness, God’s discipline, ruining the church’s witness, etc.) that conquers *“I am and there is no one else.”*

### **Point 3: Rejoicing (3:14-17)**

#### **Explanation**

Removal gives way to rejoicing. 3:14-17 describes the day of the LORD experience for God’s people. The LORD exhorts those who remain to sing and rejoice:

*Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! – 3:14*

Maybe this should flavor our congregational singing? This isn't just somber reverence. There's shouting. Think loud and passionate. There's rejoicing. Think excitement. Think emotions stirred. Think whole-hearted and not just going through the motions. 3:15 explains why:

*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. – 3:15*

- 1) No longer under God's judgment = sins remembered no more
- 2) Enemies removed = no more threats to our well-being
- 3) The LORD in their midst

▪ God reigning, unhindered fellowship, paradise restored, faith will be sight

▪ Hard for me to comprehend. I know about God. He lives in me. I've been changed by him. I trust him. I fear him. I learn from him. I pour out my heart to him. But I don't see him. Fellowship is hindered. On that day we'll be in awe, and we'll rejoice in the presence of the one who loves us.

- 4) You shall never again fear evil = permanence, finality

Fear is wholly inappropriate (3:16). A thing of the past!

What will God be doing in heaven, the new heavens and new earth?

*he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. – 3:17*

We won't be the only ones celebrating. God is a being with emotions. He loves and hates. He rejoices and grieves. His heart is moved. God will dwell with us. He'll delight in us. He'll sing with passion.

*“He will quiet you by his love.”* [alternate translation: “he will be quiet in his love”]

Does this sound like Revelation 21:4? *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

Love used of Jacob's love for Rachel = husband for a wife. David's love for Jonathan = for a friend. It's opposite is hate. God's love = his affection for us. His delight in us. And delight leads to loud, passionate singing. God's affection for you will cause him to rejoice in song (“exult” = rejoice).

God rejoices over us today. Think of the father's celebration when the prodigal son returned with a repentant heart.

God rejoices in our obedience.

*A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight. – Prov 11:1*

*Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the LORD, but those of blameless ways are his delight. – Prov 11:20*

## **Application**

God is a passionate being who rejoices. Made in his image, we reflect God when we rejoice in his redemptive acts. One reason why we sing is to reflect God.

Our affections need to be stirred. Singing on Wednesday evening when my heart is dull, when I'm worn out. A time to ponder my God and pour my heart out to him. A time to let truth stir my affections.

What do you fear?

Losing your hearing. Having to go to a nursing home. Losing your spouse. The well failing. Car repairs. Being alone. Being slandered. The government taking your rights.

As I was writing this sermon I get a call from my wife about how we need four new tires for the van. Two and a half years ago I paid \$880 dollars for four new tires that were rated for 80,000 miles. The front two failed inspection and the back two look mint. Kaitlin discovered the tires were the wrong size and the tire dealers said they weren't 80,000 mile tires. I fear unexpected expenses. I fear car repairs.

The good news is one day God will dwell with us and fear will be inappropriate. Today threats exist. Then threats will cease.

## **Point 4: Restoration (3:18-20)**

### **Explanation**

Reproach will end. No more being mocked, slandered, falsely accused, dishonored. Those who've experienced shame, (lame and the outcast), will have their fortunes restored. The picture is role reversal. Jesus put it this way in Matthew 19:30: "*But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*" The little band of believers in Judah who were humiliated and scattered by Babylon will be renowned among the nations.

### **RECAP (for those who want the details)**

What happens on the day of the LORD?

- 1) Reformation - the nations redeemed, the humble don't sin anymore
- Announces the future salvation of the Gentiles without specifying the details
- 2) Removal – the proud removed
- 3) Rejoicing – the humble remain, God present, fear a thing of the past

### **Application**

This was addressed to the believing remnant of Judah in 630-620 BC. Why do I believe these promises, this future, belongs to us? Here's why.

As Gentiles there was a time when we were "*strangers to the covenants of promise*" (Eph 2:12)

- 1) Abrahamic covenant: all the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (Gen 12:3), everlasting possession of Canaan (Gen 17:8) = the whole world, not just Canaan, per Paul (Rom 4:13)
- 2) Davidic covenant: Israel would never be disturbed again by their enemies, and an offspring of David would reign over an eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7:10-16)
- 3) New covenant

*"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." – Jeremiah 31:31-34*

- God's law internalized, everyone in the community knows the LORD in saving relationship, sin remembered no more

These are the covenants of promise and they belong to us! Furthermore, Christ effected the new covenant at the cross. We celebrate the blood of the new covenant during the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:28). We experience the new covenant in terms of the indwelling Spirit (God's law internalized) and sins remembered no more.

### **What does this mean for us?**

These promises, God present, everlasting possession of the world = an eternal kingdom, reproach removed, God's law in us, everyone present knows the LORD, sins remembered no more, all of these come to us through faith in Christ alone.

Promises kept because Jesus went to the cross as our substitute. Taking the punishment we deserved and paying the price necessary for our forgiveness. If we trust Jesus, if we humble ourselves before God and fear him, these promises belong to us!

- 1) It means wait expectantly for that day. You have something to look forward to! You are not without hope in this world. God will restore his broken creation. The story ends better than we could have dreamed!

This is the message of Zephaniah!

### **Conclusion**

How should we think about the day of the LORD? **Reformation.** God saves us to make us new, in this life. **Removal.** Two ways to live. Is my response to God pride or humility? **Rejoicing.** Rejoice in redemption you've already experienced as you await the redemption to come. **Restoration.** If your faith is in Jesus, these promises of a new heavens and new earth belong to you.