

Unit III: Called to God's Work of Justice

The Return of Joy

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 47

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Zephaniah 3

PRINT PASSAGE: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Key Verse— Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. (Zephaniah 3:19, KJV)

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“At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame.” (Zephaniah 3:19, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Discern the need for the just restoration of God's people.
- Aspire to trust God for victory, hope, and renewal.
- Celebrate the return of joy and God's glory in salvation.

*Key Terms

Restore (verse 20)—Hebrew: *shub* (shoob): to reverse; to “turn back” (KJV).

Singing (verse 17)—Hebrew: *rinnah* (rin-naw’): a ringing cry; rejoicing; shouts of joy.

Zion (verse 16)—Hebrew: *Tsiyyon* (tsee-yone’): a mountain in Jerusalem.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Life Happens

Buddy was made to feel less than a man. As an African-American, educated man, Buddy was ostracized at work by his executive team and contemporaries. He was made to feel dumb and inferior just because his perspectives were different. Plus, being the only person of color seemed to work against him rather than for him.

Yet, Buddy held tight to his strong conviction and faith. He embraced the promises of God and the Zephaniah 3:19 Scripture verse, which states, “At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame” (NIV).

Somehow, some way, Buddy believes that God will come to his rescue in His time. He can smile



Overview

The book of Zephaniah was written about 640–630 BC. Zephaniah was a prophet and a man of moral earnestness. Records state that he was the son of Cushi, who may have been an Ethiopian. It is debated whether Zephaniah had royal blood, as it is indicated he was a descendant of Hezekiah's. This may have been Hezekiah the famous king or another Hezekiah. Zephaniah, meaning “Yahweh has hidden/protected,” prophesied during the reign of Josiah, which was between 640 and 612 BC. The first hearers of Zephaniah's preaching were the people of Judah approximately forty years before the invasion of the Babylonians. The prophet spoke about God's judgment of sin and the goodness to the godly of both the Gentiles and the Jewish people. Zephaniah prophesied and warned the people of Judah about the judgment against the city in chapter 1. In chapter 2, Zephaniah prophesied encouragement to seek the Lord and do what was right. In chapter 3, Zephaniah prophesied that there would be a day of restoration of righteousness. He explained the return of joy and God's glory in salvation if only the people would do what was right. He encouraged trust and hope in God for their victory.

only did God want the people of Judah to celebrate, but also, God Himself was rejoicing along with them. He said the people should sing, shout, and be glad. “Be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem” (**verse 14**). The people of Judah would come out of a dreadful time of exile, and then they would be blessed with a new way of life. There would be no more pending judgment on their acts of sin, no more destruction from the enemy, and no more evil/death pending in their lives (**verse 15**). Instead, there would be a transformation of the heart so they would repent and receive God's grace and mercy. It is a joyous occasion and time for a party to celebrate God's holy and mighty works. This is a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus, who came to free us from sin. The stripes He received were for us. He took a vicious beating before His death and His resurrection; as a result, we are free and saved. Our salvation was bought at a price, which He paid in full for His children to have eternal life. All we have to do is trust and believe. In Jesus we must have faith and accept Him as our Lord and Savior. Just as Israel will never again fear any

although he may want to cry, because the joy of the Lord is upon him and his family.

Questions

1. How have you been able to find joy in the midst of turmoil?
2. How has your faith in God grown or been renewed?

COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

It's Party Time! (*Zephaniah 3:14-15*)

KJV

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

15 The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.

NIV

14 Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem!

15 The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.

After Judah would have experienced some trying times with their oppressors, the time would come for God to restore His people. In **verse 14**, after God had redeemed His people, it was now time to celebrate. Not

harm from their oppressors, we too will no longer have to fear or be afraid of what is to come, if we have chosen Jesus as our Savior.

? What Do You Think? We all have faced struggles and even fallen short in some situations. As believers, how can we reassure others that God is a just God and encourage them to wait on Him for the ultimate breakthrough?

Because He Loves Us (*Zephaniah 3:16-17*)

KJV

16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to *Zion*, Let not thine hands be slack.

17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with *singing*.

NIV

16 On that day they will say to Jerusalem, “Do not fear, *Zion*; do not let your hands hang limp.

17 “The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with *singing*.”

The phrase “in that day” refers to the Day of Judgment and/or any time the Lord God came, whether to punish or to save His people. However, in this verse God is instructing His people not to be afraid because they are freed from judgment (**verse 16a**). Although they deserved punishment, God was with them, protecting them from whatever may come their way. Now that they had been redeemed, God instructed the Israelites to continuously work toward the rebuilding of His Temple (**verse 16b**). He was going to be for them—and if God is for you, then no one can stand against you (see Romans 8:31). In addition, God was not only for them and with them, but also, He was celebrating and rejoicing with them as well. His love for His people is like no other. And because of His love, the Warrior King would derail the plans of Judah’s enemies, remove their deserving punishment, and save them from all danger. What a blessing for the people of Judah to have a Father and a God such as this.

What an amazing God we serve. Just as He celebrated their return, our Father will celebrate our return, welcoming us back with open arms and forgiveness (**verse 17**). Because He loves us just as He loved the people of Judah, all we have to do is repent of our sin and have faith in Him, who is above all and can do exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or think according to the power that works in you and in me. While saving us, God will also be rejoicing with us with praises and singing. Can you imagine the sound of God’s singing? Oh, what a beautiful sound it will be!

? What Do You Think? As a church, we know that it is vital that we trust God and His grace in every situation. Are you trying to lead in your own strength? How can you rest in the strength supplied only by God?

It's Gathering Time (*Zephaniah 3:18-20*)

KJV

18 I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.

19 Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

20 At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I *turn back* your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

NIV


18 “I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you.

19 “At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame.

20 “At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I *restore* your fortunes before your very eyes,” says the LORD.

Jerusalem was going to be a city of desolation. Those mourning were those who had been taken out of Jerusalem. But one day, their descendants will return. It was gathering time for all oppressors and for the people of God. There was no time to worry about the appointed festivals. God was among them now. He was going to punish the unjust and pour out His love for the faithful (**verse 18**). God had promised His people a plan for eternity with Him. He restores all who are burdened, broken, and suffering and brings them to a place of honor for everyone to witness (**verse 19**). God is going to bring them home and grace His children. The kingdom of God will return to a place of justice with righteousness and full of God's grace. Again, God is going to gather His children and restore them abundantly above all, right before their own eyes and for everyone else to see that He is proud of the return of His people and the return of joy (**verse 20**). The prophet ended this outline with “saith the LORD,” meaning God said it and that settles it. It will be done because it is His promise to us.

Just as God is proud of the ones today who have repented and returned to Him, it is never too late to start over and turn back to Him. God loves us and wants to redeem us. This is the prophecy of Zephaniah and the promise of God. So, remember to have faith, repent of your sins, and trust and believe that God will restore you. God will gather all who have repented and have been adopted into His family. We are His children. He will restore us each and every time we return to Him for the world to see, and what a joyous time it will be. Let's celebrate and rejoice in the Lord today!

 **What Do You Think?** As Christians, we know that God our Father is always with us. Have you thanked Him recently for His presence?

Your Life

In our lives, some of us get caught up in situations that are hard to get out of; this may be because we have turned away from God. But there is no better time than now to return to Him. Let's rejoice!

Your World!

In today's society, we go through many struggles; however, we must remember that God is with us. We must reestablish our relationship with Him, for it is the source for our salvation.



Closing Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, we thank You for Your presence here today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY , May 4	"God's Worldwide Covenant with Abraham"	(Genesis 12:1-8)
TUESDAY , May 5	"A New Covenant of the Heart"	(Jeremiah 31:31-34)
WEDNESDAY , May 6	"Divided Peoples to Become One"	(Ezekiel 37:15-23)
THURSDAY , May 7	"Just Living in Church and the World"	(Romans 12:9-21)
FRIDAY , May 8	"Cultivate Peaceful and Just Relations"	(1 Thessalonians 5:12-22)
SATURDAY , May 9	"Joyful Feasts Draw Newcomers"	(Zechariah 8:18-23)
SUNDAY , May 10	"Enjoy Fruits of Peace and Justice"	(Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17)

Notes
