

Zephaniah 3:14-17

- ¹⁴ Sing, O Daughter of Zion;
shout aloud, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
O Daughter of 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.
- ¹⁶ On that day they will say to Jerusalem,
“Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands hang limp.
- ¹⁷ The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.” (NIV84)
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WE CAN REJOICE BECAUSE HE DOES

The young man sat in his upstairs bedroom physically sore from a car accident that he had just gotten himself into. Nothing was broken, no major injuries – just all around sore. But, the worst part of it hadn't come yet. Physically he was kind of sore, emotionally he was a bigger wreck than that car, and here's why. It wasn't his car and he wasn't supposed to be driving it. It was dad's new sports car and the he found the keys at home that morning so he decided to go on a joy ride, but that ride ended in anything but joy – disaster and now serious painful punishment was coming on top of it all.

That's kind of the situation that God's people were in in our lesson for today. They had turned their back on God. Zephaniah was God's prophet in the years leading up to their conquest and captivity at the hands of the Babylonians. And as God's prophet at that time to those people, you can imagine the message that he was required to speak to them! “You are going to get it when your Father gets home!”

And those people who were listening to Zephaniah would have had no excuse. They were absolutely guilty of the things that the prophet spoke. They had turned their backs on God and followed the ways of the world. They put their allegiance in the nations that surrounded them and the gods that they worshipped. They were guilty and were without excuse.

Like the young man who crashed the car, they knew that punishment was coming. They were bracing themselves, hoping to be able to dodge the thunderbolts of God's wrath that they knew were coming their way.

If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we have incited God's wrath and anger as well. We offer half-hearted devotion to God, and many times it's not even half of our hearts that God gets. We often show that we are more concerned with what the people around us think versus the way that God wants us to live. We adopt the ungodly ways of those who live around us and we often hope

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that no one finds out our real identity as Christians. We show every day that it is our selves that we'd rather be serving than God or anyone else.

We are just as guilty as God's Old Testament people. Right along with them we should be looking to dodge the thunderbolts of God's anger and expecting wrath. We know that we have failed to live up to God's standards and that we deserve eternal captivity in the grave and in hell. We know that judgment is coming our way.

And that's what makes Zephaniah's words so surprising this morning! His book is 3 chapters long. The first 2 ½ chapters are law and judgment, well-deserved law, judgement, and condemnation. But in the last ½ chapter – some of the sweetest words you'll ever hear! From dread over sin and threats of punishment, Zephaniah changes to a sweet melody - from deserved punishment to undeserved love! Hear the words of God's prophet before us today!

- 14 Sing, O Daughter of Zion;
shout aloud, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
O Daughter of 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.*
- 16 On that day they will say to Jerusalem,
“Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands hang limp.*
- 17 The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.”*

Such unexpected and undeserved comfort! Even though the past was already written a history of their unfaithfulness, even though their present had more challenges than they were ready to face on their own, God assured them that their future was written in love.

Even though the history of **our** unfaithfulness is all too painfully clear, even though we have our own unique challenges in our present day lives, our God tells us, too, that our future is secure and it's a future to rejoice in. And the reason for Israel's hope and yours is the same: ***The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy.***

The Lord has turned back our biggest enemy, by sending Jesus. In his perfection, he destroyed the power of sin. By allowing death to strike him, he dealt death a death blow. In rising from the grave he assured us of victory. Jesus' heel was struck, but the devil's head was crushed. Satan holds no power, he's been turned back by Jesus and his saving work.

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He's turned back the biggest enemies in your life, now you can face the smaller foes – depression, anxiety, addiction, cancer, broken relationships, aging, loss of a loved one, loss of independence, loss of purpose. These are weighty challenges, ones that we may not be able to navigate on our own, but thank God that Zephaniah's words are still true today, yes even in your life: ***The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save.*** You may not be strong enough to face the challenges of this world, But God is. He is mighty to save and he longs to carry you though life in his arms.

God has already given us plenty of reason to do just what Zephaniah encourages: to ***Sing... shout aloud...be glad...and rejoice***, but the good news continues:

***He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.***

God doesn't just reluctantly take away punishment, turn back our enemy and flex his muscles to save us! No he does those things gladly because he ***takes great delight*** in us. He loves us and wants us to be with him forever. That's why he's done all that must be done to work our salvation. That's why he's gone to such great lengths to ensure that we will live with him in glory. It's because he delights in us.

Sing...shout aloud...be glad...rejoice! Those are things that you're likely not surprised to see happening in church, things you aren't surprised to see Christians doing together as they consider the love that God has and the salvation that he's secured for us. You probably aren't surprised to learn or be reminded that the Third Sunday in Advent is "Rejoice Sunday." But what Amazing Grace and wonderful good news to hear that those are the things that God does over you. ***Sing...shout aloud...be glad...rejoice!*** is what Zephaniah bids us do, but it's what he tells us God does over us!

***He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.***

So my friends, let's live praise-worthy lives to God's glory. Let's give God a reason to smile, as we live out our lives of service. Let's let our joy overflow into the hearts and lives of those around us. Let's sing God's praises, let's shout aloud his love. Let's look for others to tell that through Jesus, God rejoices in them too. Let's tell them the joy inspiring message that God has forgiven them and longs for them to be with him forever.

My dear friends – rejoice! Rejoice that punishment is taken away. Rejoice that victory is ours. Celebrate his love. Don't be shy, but rejoice. **We can rejoice in him, because he rejoices in us.** Amen.