

**XI. “The LORD Your God in Your Midst”**

17-May-03 Zephaniah 3:1-20

*Theme:* When the Lord comes on His Day in judgment upon the wicked, He will gather together His people from all nations, purify them, and cause them to live with Him forever in peace and joy.

*Key Verse:* Zephaniah 3:17 “The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”

Review

Last week we looked at Zephaniah chapter 2. In it we saw the call to repentance before the coming of the great Day of the Lord. The Day is coming. It is sure. So before it comes, humble yourself and seek the Lord, seek righteousness, and seek meekness. Then *perhaps* you will be saved, says Zephaniah. This is a severe warning to God’s people. We have assurance of salvation, because it rests in Christ alone and not ourselves, but we are still told in the New Testament to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling.” That’s Zephaniah’s message. Don’t presume that you are safe. Don’t assume that because you said a prayer of salvation that everything is fine now. Don’t ignore the warning: repent, return, seek the Lord. Or you will end up like all the other nations, says Zephaniah. Judgment comes to the pagans in Zephaniah 2, to the north, south, east, and west. This is a picture of universal judgment. The nations will be spoiled and God’s remnant shall survive. This message applied to the immediate historical context with Judah and Babylon. But the warning still applies to us today. Jesus Christ is coming again soon in judgment, in wrath. Flee to Him and survive the coming Day of His wrath.

Introduction

Today is our last day in the book of Zephaniah, where we find a final word of judgment upon God’s people (3:1-8). However, in the second half of Zephaniah 3, the prophet turns to a wonderful word of blessing and consolation that provides joy and hope to the Church (3:9-20). Thus, we again see that the coming of the Lord in His “Day” brings both judgment upon the wicked and blessing upon the true people of God. This message was not just for the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BC church; it is for all time.

Exposition

**III. God Reconstitutes His People with the Arrival of That Great Day (3:1-20)**

**A. God Will Finally Judge the Rebellious (3:1-8)**

- 1 Woe  
for the rebellious,  
the polluted,  
the oppressing city.
- 2 a She has not hearkened  
b to the Voice;  
a she has not accepted  
b correction.  
a In Yahweh  
b she has not trust;

## Minor Prophets: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

- a to her God*  
*b she has not drawn near.*
- 3 *a Her princes in her midst*  
*b (are) roaring lions;*  
*a her judges*  
*b evening wolves;*  
*they leave no gnawing for the morning.*
- 4 *a Her prophets*  
*b (are) reckless,*  
*b men of deception;*  
*a her priests*  
*b have profaned the holy place;*  
*b they have done violence to the torah.*
- 5 *Yahweh is righteous*  
*in her midst;*  
*He will never do evil.*  
*Morning by morning He will bring His justice to light;*  
*He shall never fail.*  
*But the evil know no shame.*
- 6 *I have cut off*  
*nations;*  
*their corner towers are destroyed.*  
*I have devastated*  
*their streets*  
*so no one passes by;*  
*their cities are laid waste*  
*so no one dwells there.*
- 7 *I said:*  
*Surely she will fear Me,*  
*she will receive correction*  
*so her refuge will not be cut off,*  
*(because of) all the punishment I have inflicted on her.*  
*But alas!*  
*They rose early,*  
*they acted corruptly*  
*in all their doings.*
- 8 *Therefore:*  
*Wait for Me,*  
*declares Yahweh,*  
*for the Day when I rise to testify.*
- For My determination (is)*  
*a to gather*  
*b nations*  
*a to assemble*  
*b kingdoms,*

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*to pour out on them  
My fury—  
all My burning wrath.  
For in the fire of My jealousy  
all the earth will be consumed.*

As a rhetorical device, the prophet would gradually get to the heart of his message of judgment by first dealing with the neighboring peoples. The audience would agree that they deserved what God was giving them, so they would not be prepared for the recitation of their own faults as well (cf Am. 1:3-2:16). Now the time is rhetorically ripe to confront God's own people, Judah, and their capital, Jerusalem, with their sin (vv. 1-4), shamelessness (v. 5) and lack of repentance (vv. 6-7).

References to "the city" (v. 1) permeate this section. **However, the identity of the city mourned in this dirge (cf 2:5) is not explicit.** The preceding context would suggest that Nineveh is still being referred to, so Israel would have continued in agreement with God's oracles of judgment against this city. **This type of rhetorical device brings the message home by having the audience identifying with it by agreeing with its content.** It is rhetorically powerful because the hearers soon realize that it is not after all Nineveh which is being condemned, but rather Jerusalem, their own capital, and that not their enemy but they themselves are being judged by God. The lack of response to Yahweh (v. 2), who is Israel's God and not Assyria's, and who is closely associated with the condemned city (v. 5), supports the suggested identification of Jerusalem as the city referred to here.

1. The city is characterized as *rebellious, polluted, and oppressing*. These three terms indicate that it is a people in covenant with Yahweh against whom this prophecy is spoken. *Polluted* also suggests an uncleanness which disqualifies a person from performing a sacred task or maintaining a distinctive relationship.

2. **This one city is unique. She has heard the voice of God. Nineveh has not had such a privilege.** Neither have the cities of Cush, Moab, Ammon, nor the Philistine cities of the Pentapolis. This city alone has heard. **But she has not hearkened to the Voice.** Ten times in the wilderness, the people would not hearken to God's voice (Num. 14:22). So the Lord swore that none of them would ever see the land He had promised on oath to their fathers. This city also *has not accepted correction*. Did she think the calamities that came on her had nothing to do with God's hand of chastening judgment? How could she fail to interpret correctly the providential disciplines which the Lord lovingly brought to her? This glorious city, beautiful for situation, the joy of all the earth, the locale chosen of God for His dwelling place—this city *has not trusted in Yahweh*. This city also is guilty because to her God *she has not drawn near*. **The concept of "drawing near" to God very frequently is associated with worship in the OT.** Approaching the Almighty must always include adoration.

3. Having delivered his indictment against the whole populace of the chosen city, the prophet now specifies his charges **against the various elements of leadership** which are primarily responsible for this wholesale degeneration. Princes, judges, prophets, and priests each receive their writ of condemnation. Zephaniah deals **first with civil officials (v. 3), and then with religious leaders (v. 4).**

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4. Throughout Israel's national history, conflict centered on the struggle between true and false *prophets*. Particularly as the nation's history moved toward the tragedy of expulsion from the land, the tension among prophets increased. Zephaniah lashes out against his contemporaries. A single prophet dares to condemn the many.

The *priests* in Israel performed multiple tasks, all of which affected profoundly the spiritual and social welfare of the nation. Among their duties was the responsibility to distinguish between the holy and the common (cf. Lev. 10:10). But these priests of Judah *have profaned the holy place*. Even the holy place itself lost its significance to the people as the locale of God's dwelling. Inevitably a disorientation of the whole of life had to follow. The priests of Israel also sat as the chief justices of the land. Their decision was designated as *torah*, and bound all parties to obedience. But the priests of Zephaniah's day *have done violence to the torah*. Not only have they brought havoc in the lives of these who have been bound by their decisions. Their assault has been against the law of God itself.

5. In contrast with the injustice run rampant among all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the prophet depicts Yahweh in their midst as always doing right! **Remarkably, the prophet asserts that Yahweh is still in her midst. The Lord's presence in the midst of this city clearly indicates that Jerusalem is the place under discussion, even though it is not specifically mentioned. Only Jerusalem possesses such a distinct privilege.**

6. Before announcing the inevitability of God's destructive judgments on these corrupted sinners, the Lord rehearses the numerous expressions of his patience in the past. Now the Lord speaks in the first person. National integrity violated, avenues of commerce stilled, once-busy cities laid waste. Does the experience of other nations teach nothing to Judah?

7. Now **the Lord explicitly indicates His intention in devastating other nations as well as chastening Judah.** These manifestations of His righteous judgments would hopefully instill a godly fear in His people. Then they would be spared absolute devastation. Surely they will *fear Him*. The Lord's ultimate goal in inflicting Judah was that their *refuge will not be cut off*. **Although His chastening might bring many distresses on the nation, they were calculated to preserve a place of salvation.** They have acted corruptly *in all their doings*. As in the days before the flood, a time had come once more in which all flesh had corrupted its way before the Lord (Gen. 6:12).

8. After the immediately preceding verses, it might be expected that the prophet would focus his announcement of judgment specifically on Jerusalem. But instead the prophet depicts an assembly of all nations. God shall pour out his wrath on the entire earth. Who shall be able to endure this Day of His coming? Who shall stand when He appears? Zephaniah, speaking for the Lord, says that on that Day, *in the fire of My jealousy all the earth will be consumed*.

When Jesus presents the terrors of God's coming judgment, He intertwines the destruction of Jerusalem with the end of the age so that the two aspects of His prophetic declaration cannot be separated (Luke 21:20-22). The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 anticipated that great Day of Yahweh which shall consummate the Lord's judgments, even as did the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. **Even as in Zephaniah's prophecy, so also in Jesus' prophecy, the judgment of God on Jerusalem inevitably anticipates the final devastation of the nations.**

**B. God Will Ultimately Purify His Remnant (3:9-13)**

- 9 *For then*  
*I shall convert the nations*  
*so that they speak with a purified lip,*  
*that they all may call on the name of Yahweh,*  
*to serve Him with a single shoulder.*
- 10 *From beyond the rivers of Cush*  
*my suppliants,*  
*the daughter of My dispersed people,*  
*will bring My offering.*
- 11 *In that day*  
*you will not be ashamed*  
*for all your deeds*  
*by which you have sinned against Me.*
- For then*  
*I shall remove from your midst*  
*those among you who pridefully rejoice.*  
*You will not exalt yourself every again*  
*in My holy mountain.*
- 12 *But I shall leave in your midst*  
*a humble and poor people,*  
*who will seek shelter in the name of Yahweh.*
- 13 *The remnant of Israel*  
*will not do*  
*evil,*  
*will not speak*  
*a lie;*  
*a deceitful tongue*  
*will not be found in their mouth.*
- For they*  
*will feed*  
*and lie down,*  
*and none will make afraid.*

In the immediately preceding section, Zephaniah had depicted the final assembly of nations on the Day. But now **speaking out of the framework of an assumed scattering of His own people in judgment, the prophet depicts the formation of a new community of holy people.** This restored remnant shall consist not only of a purged and forgiven group from Israel (cf. 3:11-13). The converted from the nations shall join with his people in the worship and service of the one true God (3:9-10). But how can the prophet speak of the salvation of a remnant both from the nations as well as from Israel? Already he had declared that the entirety of the universe was to be overturned on a scale comparable to the destruction that occurred with the flood in Noah's day (1:2-3). Zephaniah simply does not resolve explicitly the tension that might be felt among various aspects of his message. **He saw a destruction in judgment beyond any proportions that the world had experienced previously. He saw also a wondrous conversion among the nations of the world as well as among the scattered people of Israel.** He does not explain

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how cosmic judgment and far-reaching salvation coordinate, but he faithfully proclaims both elements.

The nations of Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush, and Assyria all have experienced the devastations anticipated by the prophet. The city of Jerusalem also has experienced the utter devastations promised by the prophet, both in 586 BC. and in AD 70. These awesome destructions in turn have become the basis for an extension of subsequent prophetic anticipation concerning cosmic devastation, particularly in the intermingling of the then-future destruction of Jerusalem with the final cosmic conflagration in the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 24:3-44). **In the meantime, a holy remnant both of Jews and Gentiles continues to be assembled.** This development coordinates quite appropriately with the message of salvation presented by the prophet.

**9. *I shall convert the nations.*** Any turning of the nations must clearly be attributed to the sovereign grace of God. Yahweh takes on a new role as savior. The Lord's special gift to these nations is that *they speak with a purified lip*, reminiscent of God's seraph cleansing Isaiah (Is. 6:5-7). The significance of this phrase is found in the next statement: *that they all may call on the name of Yahweh.* **This could be seen as a reversal of Babel**, with a common language replacing a plurality of tongues. The purpose of the purification, as that of Isaiah's cleansing, is to address God appropriately. From among all the gentile nations a people shall arise who will utter with purest lips the most sacred words. They shall call on the name of Yahweh for salvation, in worship and service. **Joel also connects the coming Day of Yahweh with a widespread "calling on the name of the Lord" for salvation (Joel 2:32).** This prophecy becomes the basis for the apostolic interpretation of the events on the day of Pentecost following Christ's resurrection. **By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the purification of heart and lip was accomplished that led to a widespread calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21).** Not only with their lips, but also with their lives they will serve Him. In a most impressive figure, the prophet depicts this mutual service of the gentile nations *with a single shoulder*. **Bowing determinedly and unitedly, these converts to Yahweh will express their adoration to their Lord by assuming the rugged task of the lowliest servant. This is a universal picture, since all peoples will take part. The purpose of the punishment, not only of Judah but of all the nations, is restoration for all, conversion of the pagans to Yahweh.**

**10.** The sovereign grace of God will reach *beyond the rivers of Cush* in its converting of the nations. Past the southernmost branches of the Nile, deep into the continent of Africa, shall come prayers for salvation addressed to Yahweh alone.

**11.** Now the prophet returns to his treatment of the future expectation awaiting the city of Jerusalem. This great Day shall include the purging of sin from the remnant of Israel as well as the destruction of the wicked. The city *will not be ashamed*, but not because its inhabitants have no guilt. **This city which now is free from all shame is the same city that earlier had been rebuked because it knew no shame (3:5; cf. 2:1).** How great will be that day in which all shame will be removed from the community of God's people. **Not only will guilt be eliminated; all the crippling psychological effects of sin shall be wiped away. Each person will attain his full potential in service to God** because a guilty conscience will not render him incapable of functioning freely in service to God.

**12.** This remnant is designated as *humble and poor*. These designations should be understood primarily as describing **a moral attribute rather than a social status**. This remnant, in humble acceptance of the previous admonition, regard themselves as no better than a heap of stubble

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suiting for consumption by the fire of God's anger (2:2). They find deliverance only because they *seek shelter in the name of Yahweh*.

**13.** Now the prophet describes the consequences rather than the causes of the Lord's preserving a remnant. The moral character of the remnant conforms to the nature of the Lord who has delivered them. **Re-created in true righteousness and holiness, this preserved remnant reflects the image of God in their patterns of behavior** (cf. Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). Departing from the imagery of the "city" that has permeated the chapter, he now speaks in terms of a flock adequately fed and protected: *For they will feed and lie down*. **The covenantal core of "I shall be your God and you shall be My people" becomes a perfected reality in the experience of the restored remnant. They shall be His people, doing His will; and He shall be their God, shepherding them in a restored paradise.**

**So the prophet depicts the Day in which Yahweh ultimately will purify His remnant.** This divine intervention will mean salvation for Gentile peoples as well as restoration for His own. A forgiven, humbled, and purified people will enjoy the ultimate blessings of paradise restored. **This entire complex of ideas finds its fulfillment in the realities of the new covenant.** God's ancient people of Israel join with converts from the world's distant climes. They call on the name of the Lord with lips purified by the Holy Spirit, serving him with a single shoulder. This community of the new covenant, heir to all the blessings prefigured in the old, have all shame removed and all pride purged. They manifest the sensitive moral character of a people who will do no evil, who will not lie. They live in safety with no one to terrify them. **The records of the new covenant attest to the fulfillment of all these promises, while at the same time pointing to an ultimate consummation in the future.** Only then, in that Day, shall a completed restoration be enjoyed to the fullest.

### C. God Will Then Rejoice with His People (3:14-20)

- 14 a *Sing,*  
b *daughter of Zion;*  
a *shout,*  
b *Israel;*  
a *rejoice and be jubilant with all your heart,*  
b *daughter of Jerusalem.*
- 15 a *Yahweh has removed*  
b *your punishments,*  
a *He has turned back*  
b *your enemy.*  
*The King of Israel,*  
*Yahweh,*  
*(is) in your midst;*  
*never will you fear evil again.*
- 16 *In that day*  
a *it shall be said of Jerusalem,*  
b *Do not fear;*  
a *Zion*  
b *do not let your hands fall limp.*
- 17 *Yahweh your God (is) in your midst,*  
a *mighty hero who saves.*

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- a He will delight*
    - b over you*
    - c with joy;*
  - a He will be quiet*
    - b (over you)*
    - c in His love;*
  - a He will rejoice*
    - b over you*
    - c with singing.*
- 18 *Those who are grieved because of the appointed feasts*  
*I shall gather;*  
*from you they originated.*  
*A burden on her was reproach.*
- 19 *At that time I shall deal with all your oppressors.*  
  - a I shall save*
  - b the lame,*
  - b and the banished*
  - a I shall gather.*

*And I shall give them*  
*honor*  
*and fame*  
*in all the land of their shame.*

20 *At that time*  
*I shall make you return;*  
*at (that) time*  
*I shall gather you.*  
*For I shall give you*  
*fame*  
*and honor*  
*among all the peoples of the earth*  
*when I return your captivities*  
*before your eyes,*  
*says Yahweh.*

**One of the most awesome descriptions of the wrath of God in judgment found anywhere in Scripture appears in the opening verses of Zephaniah.** The totality of the cosmos shall be consumed in his burning anger. The very order of creation shall be overturned. **One of the most moving descriptions of the love of God for His people found anywhere in Scripture appears in the closing verses of Zephaniah.** God and His people attain heights in the ecstasy of love that are hard to comprehend.

In a form similar to other psalms of salvation (cf Ps. 98; Is. 12:-6; 52:7-10), the prophet commands praise (v. 14) not only for what Yahweh has done in the past (v. 15a), and also for future deliverance (v. 17), but for the very presence of Yahweh in the midst of the nation as the loving king who inspires confidence (vv. 15-17).

14. The prophet opens this final message with a grand summons for the people to rejoice. **The prophetic “Woe” had been spoken over the royal city of Jerusalem.** Sadness and depression would seem to be the order of the day. But the prophet can look beyond these tragedies. **He calls for an unrestrained celebration of joy.** In his confidence about this future glory, he summons the people now to sing this song of celebration.

15. The prophet asserts that Yahweh *has removed your punishments*. The *enemy* of Judah also has been turned *back*. The assurance of the prophet concerning these blessings is based on the fact that *the King of Israel is in your midst*. It is Zion and Jerusalem that he reassures with his call for unrestrained jubilation. The maintenance of the Davidic city was as central to God’s covenant with David as was the continuance of his royal line. Yet Zephaniah stresses the continuance of the city, while leaving unmentioned the monarchy.

16. When God has removed all Israel’s punishments and is established as King in their midst, then it shall be said to Jerusalem, *Do not fear*. Total absence of dread and anxiety will be the joyous state of the reconstituted people of God.

17. Now the prophet moves into the “holy of holies” by a **rapturous description of the love of God for His people. This verse is the John 3:16 of the OT.** The love of God for His own people is not a soft, sentimental emotion that has no strength to act on behalf of its object. *He is a mighty hero who saves.* **His love acts concretely to deliver His people.** The next portion of this verse may be called a “poem of personal love.” Three parallel lines each containing **three phrases express the deepest inner joy and satisfaction of God Himself in His love for His people.** Delight, joy, rejoicing, and singing on God’s part underscore the mutuality of emotional experience felt by God and the redeemed. That Almighty God should derive delight from His own creation is significant in itself. But that the Holy One should experience ecstasy over the sinner is incomprehensible.

The middle line of the poetic triad provides some difficulty in interpretation. The most straightforward is the most likely: *He will be quiet (over you) in His love.* Almighty God, quiet in His love. God the mighty savior, quietly contemplating, contented in His love for you. The real difficulty lies in assimilating personally the prophet’s repeated declaration concerning the object of the all-absorbing love of God. *Over you* He will delight; *over you* He will rejoice with singing; *over you* will He be quiet in His love. This *you* of the prophet obviously contains the limitation of contextual definition. It is the *you* that is called “Jerusalem,” “Zion,” “Israel” (vv. 14-16). **None other than the elect of God are the objects of such all-consuming love.** Them He loves because He loves them (Deut. 7:6-8). Whoever they are, whatever their ethnic or moral background, wherever they may be located, this same unchanging love of God reaches to “all who call on the name of the Lord” (v. 9). This global extension of the love of God is not merely a hypothetical possibility. It is a temporal and historical reality. **So the prophet describes a love of God exceeding all human imaginations.**

Moses declares to Israel: as the Lord once rejoiced over you to do you good, so He will rejoice over you to destroy you (Dt. 28:63). But the nation could take comfort in the fact that ultimately the Lord will return “to rejoice over you for good” (30:9). Zephaniah sees the fulfillment of this ancient promise in the future manifestation of the love of God for His people.

18. The opening words are particularly difficult. But the major thrust seems clear. Zephaniah envisions a day in which all the sorrows associated with God’s judgment on His people shall be removed. *I shall gather* those who are grieved because of the appointed feasts, declared the

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Lord. He would reverse the processes of dispersion; He would gather those who had been scattered.

19. Now the prophet promises that Israel shall be secure in their land. The Lord shall deal with all their oppressors. He shall secure their borders and deliver them from the curse of being a scattered nation, tossed to and fro among all the peoples of the earth. “**Gathering**” implies more than simply returning the people to their land. They shall be **assembled as a reconstituted community of God’s people**. Particularly striking because of its similarities with the book of Deuteronomy is the final expression of this verse. Instead of being shamed among all the peoples of the earth, the Lord will give Israel *honor and fame* (lit., “praise and a name”). These two elements are combined only in Deuteronomy and in Jeremiah outside Zephaniah (cf. Dt. 26:19; Jer. 13:11). Possibly the two prophets found a common source in the book of Deuteronomy.

20. The placing of *fame* before *honor* in contrast with the previous verse provides a simple poetic variation. The more substantial difference lies in the extent to which Israel’s fame radiates. This worldwide recognition of Israel’s glory will occur when the Lord returns their *captivities*. This promise found its immediate fulfillment in the restoration of Israel after their seventy years of captivity. At that time the banished were restored and the remnant of the Lord was reassembled in their land. In microcosmic fashion, the possession of the land by the descendants of Abraham depicted the manner in which God would complete his program for the redemption of the earth, *when I return your* [i.e., Israel’s] *captivity* anticipates the rejuvenation of the world. For it actually was the “cosmos” that Abraham and his seed were promised (Rom. 4:13).

### Conclusion

In Zephaniah 3:1-8, God gives His final word of judgment upon His rebellious people. He has done everything possible to demonstrate His love toward them, and yet they still were rebellious. They did not listen to the Voice of God or accept correction. How condemning are the words, “she has not trusted in the LORD.” Our money says “In God we trust.” Do we? **What more could God do than He had already done? There was nothing left to do, so he announces judgment on His people (3:8)**. When God asks today, as He does, “What more can I do? I have sent my Son, and they have killed even Him,” **there is far more cause for His judgment on us than there was for Judah**. You have heard the gospel. You know Christ’s teaching and have been told of His life and death for sinners. If with all that you still will not turn back from your own way and seek the Lord, what more can be done? Must judgment not fall on you just as surely and fiercely as it fell on the inhabitants of Jerusalem? Fortunately, the patience of God is long. His grace is great. You can still come to Him while His wrath tarries.

No matter how depressing the message of judgment in the Minor Prophets becomes, it is never the final word of God to God’s people. Usually even the judgments themselves offer some hope. But more than that, **after even the worst of these judgments there is always some word of ultimate and unqualified blessing**. In Zephaniah the encouragement comes in the last twelve verses (3:9-20), which is what we should expect if Zephaniah is a summation of the pre-exilic prophets. The promise of 3:9-13 first relates to a literal regathering of the people in their own land. But like the opening sections of Zephaniah, which refer to a limited historical judgment upon Judah as well as to a universal eschatological judgment upon all persons, this text too undoubtedly has a double meaning. **On the one hand, there is the historical regathering. On**

**the other hand, there is reference to a greater gathering of people of God in the heavenly Jerusalem.**

Are you part of that remnant? There is a new day for the people of God, a day marked by peace, joy, and security. But it is only for those who are really God's children. **Zephaniah gives three ways by which you can know whether you are one of God's spiritual children.** First, you can know whether you are among the people of God or not by asking whether you "*call on the name of the LORD* and serve him shoulder to shoulder" with other Christians (3: 9). It should be evident by now that calling on the name of the Lord is not a casual thing. It means a **wholehearted trust in and worship of Him to the exclusion of all others.** That is the first test. Have your lips been purified and your nature transformed so you can worship and serve God only? Second, you can know whether you are among the people of God by asking whether God has conquered your "pride" and left you "meek and humble" before Him (3:11-12). This does not mean that you must have achieved perfection now. It means that **there must be a profound and pervasive change in your inner life.** The third test for knowing whether you are among the people of God is whether you are *living a holy life* (3:13). Again, this does not mean a moral perfection, but it does mean the beginning of and **progress in a life of obedience to God.** If that is not true of you, you need to get your relationship to God straightened out now while there is still time to do it.

Assuming that you are God's child and are growing in holiness, what follows? In this chapter, **what follows is a song of joy.** What joy to have our sin forgiven and the lost relationship between ourselves and the holy God restored! The last verses of Zephaniah 3 are encouragement for the remnant of the Jews as they wait for the consummation of God's kingdom. In 3:18-20, God says "I will" seven times. If God had not pronounced His "I will," the people would not have been regathered and the Jews would have vanished from the earth. But as has been the case elsewhere in Zephaniah, **these words also have application to all God's people and to an even greater gathering of these into God's church. The regathering is a gathering of the entire people of God into Christ's flock.** This too takes the power of God for its accomplishment. It requires the new birth and the transformation of rebellious hearts. I am glad God has said He will do this. If God cannot or will not change hearts, what hope do you and I have of changing them? None whatever! That is what God does. He is doing it at this moment as He presses the claims of Jesus upon rebellious sinners' hearts. That can be your story too. What joy to find your way back to the Father's household!

So the book of Zephaniah ends where it begins. The prophet opened with a scene of cataclysmic overthrow. The whole order of the cosmos would be reversed in the judgment of the great Day of Yahweh. The prophet closes with another scene of cosmic scope. The earth shall be reconstituted in the glorious new order achieved by a return to the land on a proportion never before realized. **When the Lord comes on His Day in judgment upon the wicked, He will gather together His people from all nations, purify them, and cause them to live with Him forever in peace and joy.** The ultimate of blessing in the covenant joins with the ultimate of cursing to consummate the entirety of the historical process.

Next week: Lesson 12 – Review

Close in Prayer.