

I.N.I.

Third Sunday in Advent
Dec. 16, 2012
Zephaniah 3:14-17

In Christ Jesus, who has come to conquer all of our enemies and to take us to live in peace and safety with Him forever, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In our mid-week Advent services we are listening to Advent Ambassadors both from the Old and New Testament. Well even though today's sermon text is not part of that series, we have another one of God's Old Testament Ambassadors give us an Advent message.

Zephaniah was the great-great grandson of Hezekiah, whom we will hear about in this coming Wednesday night's sermon. He proclaimed a message during the reign of faithful King Josiah, his cousin. His message was like most of the prophets of his time---a message of Judgment and a message of deliverance.

Zephaniah continually uses the term "the day of the Lord." This term signified God's great judgment upon such nations as Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria and later upon Judah, but it also signified God's great deliverance for His faithful ones from Judah. Ultimately this term also signifies God's sending of His Son Jesus, ushering in the "last days" and His final and complete judgment upon all the nations and the deliverance of all of His faithful, called Zion, or Israel.

These thoughts of judgment and deliverance are tightly woven together like a single piece of cloth with many colors. Much of Zephaniah's revelation is in the dark, somber, terrifying colors of God's condemning Law and all-consuming judgment. This judgment would even come upon the cold and lukewarm among God's chosen people. They will find that an outward connection to the body of believers, without a heart of repentance and faith, will put them face to face with God's wrath.

We read a few examples: **THE GREAT DAY OF THE LORD IS NEAR; IT IS NEAR AND HASTENS QUICKLY. THE NOISE OF THE DAY OF THE LORD IS BITTER; THERE THE MIGHTY MEN SHALL CRY OUT. THAT DAY IS A DAY OF WRATH, A DAY OF TROUBLE AND DISTRESS, A DAY OF DEVASTATION AND DESOLATION, A DAY OF DARKNESS AND GLOOMINESS, A DAY OF CLOUDS AND THICK DARKNESS, A DAY OF TRUMPET AND ALARM AGAINST THE FORTIFIED CITIES AND AGAINST THE HIGH TOWERS. I WILL BRING DISTRESS UPON MEN, AND THEY SHALL WALK LIKE BLIND MEN, BECAUSE THEY HAVE SINNED AGAINST THE LORD; THEIR BLOOD SHALL BE Poured OUT LIKE DUST, AND THEIR FLESH LIKE REFUSE... THEREFORE WAIT FOR ME," SAYS THE LORD, "UNTIL THE DAY I RISE UP FOR PLUNDER; MY DETERMINATION IS TO GATHER THE NATIONS TO MY ASSEMBLY OF KINGDOMS, TO POUR ON THEM MY INDIGNATION, ALL MY FIERCE ANGER; ALL THE EARTH SHALL BE DEVoured WITH THE FIRE OF MY JEALOUSY.**

Interwoven with these colors of despair and judgment, however, are the brilliant and joyful colors of the Lord's Gospel of deliverance, forgiveness and salvation. We read: **IN THAT DAY YOU SHALL NOT BE SHAMED FOR ANY OF YOUR DEEDS IN WHICH YOU TRANSGRESS AGAINST ME; FOR THEN I WILL TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR MIDST THOSE WHO REJOICE IN YOUR PRIDE, AND YOU SHALL NO LONGER BE HAUGHTY IN MY HOLY MOUNTAIN. I WILL LEAVE IN YOUR MIDST A MEEK AND HUMBLE PEOPLE, AND THEY SHALL TRUST IN THE NAME OF THE LORD. THE REMNANT OF ISRAEL SHALL DO NO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS AND SPEAK NO LIES, NOR SHALL A DECEITFUL TONGUE BE FOUND IN THEIR MOUTH; FOR THEY SHALL FEED *THEIR* FLOCKS AND LIE DOWN, AND NO ONE SHALL MAKE *THEM* AFRAID.**

This brings us to our text. We read the first verse, verse 14: **SING, O DAUGHTER OF ZION! SHOUT, O ISRAEL! BE GLAD AND REJOICE WITH ALL *YOUR* HEART, O DAUGHTER OF JERUSALEM!**

Two things catch our ears; the heaping up of commands to celebrate with singing and the expression "Daughter of Zion---Daughter of Jerusalem." That is why we have chosen as our theme:

IT'S TIME TO SING CHRISTMAS CAROLS!

I: Rejoice in His great power to save.

Sing! Shout! Be glad! Rejoice! Who? All of us! We, who are the daughter of Zion, the daughter of Jerusalem, the remnant, the believers in Jesus, the Christ.

Now I am sure that the Lord speaking through Zephaniah was not speaking specifically of Christmas carols, but what greater songs of joy and rejoicing can one find; what greater songs of praise to God for His conquering of our enemies and deliverance of His people. Let us sing:

“All my heart this night rejoices as I hear far and near sweetest angel voices. ‘Christ is born,’ their choirs are singing till the air everywhere now with joy is ringing.” 77:1
Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King; Let ev’ry heart prepare Him room and heav’n and nature sing, and heav’n and nature sing, and heav’n and nature sing 87:1

Good Christian men, rejoice, with heart, and soul, and voice; now ye hear of endless bliss: Jesus Christ was born for this! He hath ope’d the heavenly door, and man is bless’ed evermore. Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!

On Christmas night all Christians sing to hear the news the angels bring; On Christmas night all Christians sing to hear the news the angels bring; News of great joy, news of great mirth, news of our merciful King’s birth. 707:1

We read verse 15: **THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY YOUR JUDGMENTS, HE HAS CAST OUT YOUR ENEMY. THE KING OF ISRAEL, THE LORD, IS IN YOUR MIDST; YOU SHALL SEE DISASTER NO MORE.**

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II: For the Lord has conquered every enemy.

The Lord in His Law declared: **FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH, and THE SOUL WHO SINS SHALL DIE.** That’s the judgment. That’s the verdict. But Zephaniah says **“THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY YOUR JUDGMENTS, HE HAS CAST OUT YOUR ENEMY.”**

If the judgment of punishment is gone, and if that great enemy, death, has been removed then what remains is simply a sleep of the body until the resurrection. All sin, all guilt is gone.

This is exactly what another prophet declared. Isaiah speaks of this Suffering Servant in this way: **BUT HE WAS WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; THE CHASTISEMENT FOR OUR PEACE WAS UPON HIM, AND BY HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED.**

The punishment we deserved because of our sins has been placed upon Christ, and He paid it in full. The Lord says in Jeremiah: **FOR I WILL FORGIVE THEIR INIQUITY, AND THEIR SIN I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.**

Sin, death, and the devil have been defeated—cast out! By whom? **THE KING OF ISRAEL, THE LORD.** All of our spiritual enemies have been cast out because this King is no mortal king, this is Jesus, the God-Man. Under His rule and kingship we have no reason to fear for we shall see disaster no more! Indeed a great reason to sing.

Rejoice, rejoice, this happy morn, a Savior unto us is born, the Christ, the Lord of Glory. His lowly birth in Bethlehem the angels from on high proclaim and sing redemption’s story. My soul, extol God’s great favor, bless Him ever for salvation, give Him praise and adoration. 79:1

Hail, the heav’nly Prince of Peace! Hail, the Sun of Righteousness! Light and life to all He brings, ris’n with healing in His wings. Mild He leaves His throne on high, born that man no more may die; born to raise the sons of earth’ born to give them second birth. Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!” 94:3

Good Christian men, rejoice, with heart, and soul, and voice; now ye need not fear the grave: Jesus Christ was born to save! Calls you one and calls you all to gain His everlasting hall. Christ was born to Save! Christ was born to Save!

And finally we read in verses 16-17: **IN THAT DAY IT SHALL BE SAID TO JERUSALEM: “DO NOT FEAR; ZION, LET NOT YOUR HANDS BE WEAK. 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.**

IT'S TIME TO SING CHRISTMAS CAROLS!

III: For the Lord rejoices over us in love.

Do not fear! Let not your hands be weak, lit. hands hang limp. Fear can paralyze a person, immobilize one. Fear can tire one out. But those days are over. There is nothing to fear. Christ is victorious! Our hands and our hearts are freed from fear.

Freed to do what? To serve the One who freed us. To serve the One who is in our midst. The One who is present with us in His Word and with His angels to protect us. He is mighty to save, lit. He is the strong man, the mighty warrior, our Hero! What a picture of power!

But Zephaniah draws for us another picture. This Mighty warrior, our Savior-God rejoices over us with gladness. We're the ones who should be filled with joy and gladness, but here we see our God is just as happy. He is happy because the great goal of His work of redemption—saving His people—has been accomplished. He is joyful because the purpose of His creation---that mankind might live in His presence forevermore—will be realized.

But now this mighty warrior in tenderness, like a mother, quiets us with His love. How many of us felt our mother's arms around us when we fell down, scraped our knee or just felt bad. Here our mighty Hero who conquers our enemies also bends down to us, wipes away our tears, gathers us up in His powerful, yet loving arms and comforts us in all of our afflictions with His amazing love. WOW!

And finally we are told **HE WILL REJOICE OVER YOU WITH SINGING!** We mentioned that a couple of weeks ago. What does God's voice sound like in song? What joy it will be to hear Him sing for joy as we come into His presence and praise Him forevermore.

Let us rise and sing our last Christmas carol:

God loves me dearly, grants me salvation; God loves me dearly, loves even me. Therefore I'll say again God loves me dearly, God loves me dearly, loves even me.

I was in bondage, sin, death, and darkness; God's love was working to make me free. Therefore I'll say again God loves me dearly, God loves me dearly, loves even me.

He sent forth Jesus, my dear Redeemer; He sent forth Jesus and set me free. Therefore I'll say again God loves me dearly, God loves me dearly, loves even me. Amen.