

God's Great Heart of Love Toward His Own

by Mike Bullmore

The sermon emphasizes the importance of acknowledging God's judgment and seeking righteousness and humility to avoid the day of the Lord's wrath.

Duration: 49:07

Scripture: Genesis 19:17, Genesis 19:26, Jeremiah 46, Zephaniah 2:1-3, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 7:13-14, Ephesians 2:12

Topics: "Love Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the book of Zephaniah in the Old Testament. He highlights the sober assessment of mankind's sinful condition and God's righteous judgment on them. However, amidst the darkness and gloom of judgment, there is a glimmer of hope. The preacher refers to the encounter between Christian and Evangelist in Pilgrim's Progress, where Christian sees a shining light. This light represents the good news of salvation from God, offering hope to sinful mankind. The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing this glimmer of hope and keeping it in our sight.

Transcript

Well, would you turn with me this morning to the book of Zephaniah. I'll give you a moment. Actually, it's not that hard to find.

It is the fourth to last book of the Old Testament. So if you go to Matthew, first book of the New Testament, and then just back up four, you'll be there. The book of Zephaniah, and for now, let me read from chapter 3, verse 9 to the end, so that we can see where all of this, and when I say all of this, I don't just mean the book of Zephaniah, I mean all that we have been reveling in for the last two days, where all of this is going.

Zephaniah chapter 3, verse 9. As I read, will you pay attention to everything. At that time, I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech. That all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord.

From beyond the rivers of Cush, my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering. On that day, you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me. For then, I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain.

But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord, those who are left in Israel. They shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue.

For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid. Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O Israel.

Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. 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. On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear not, O Zion.

Let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will quiet you by his love. He will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.

Behold, at that time, I will deal with all your oppressors. I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time, I will bring you in.

At that time, when I gather you together, for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord. Let's pray. Father, we long for this.

Certainly, we don't always long for it as much as we should, but Father, we do long for the day when you will bring all things fully and finally under the Lordship of Christ. And when we try to consider what that will mean for us, we simply do not have the capacity at present, Father, to comprehend. No human eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind of man has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.

But Lord, you give us these glimpses. And so as we as we consider this glimpse from the book of Zephaniah this morning, Lord, I pray that you would use it to pour out hope in your people's hearts. I pray that you would use it this morning to stir faith in our hearts.

God, would you once again show yourself to be glorious as you give hope to your people. Lord, we have been experiencing all through these past two days the endless riches of your word. Your word is endlessly rich because you are endlessly rich.

Your word is good because you are good. And so, Father, we pray that you would nurture us in the life of your Son through this word this morning, we pray. In John Bunyan's famous Pilgrim's Progress, right from the outset of the book, we are introduced to a man who is deeply troubled.

And who is also very conspicuously reading from a book. Listen to how Bunyan begins his story. As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place and laid me down to sleep.

And as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed that I saw a man with his face turned away from his home, a book in his hands and a great burden on his back. I looked and saw him open the book and read therein.

And as he read, he wept and trembled. And not being able to contain himself, he broke out with a lamentable cry, saying, What shall I do to be saved? For he lived in the city of destruction, which he learned from his book was doomed to be burned with fire from heaven. In which fearful overthrow both himself and his wife and their four sons would miserably perish unless some way of escape could be found.

So Christian, for that was his name, went home to talk to his family and they were greatly worried, not because they believed what he said was true, but because they thought some kind of madness had got into the poor man. And as it was drawing towards night, they hoped that sleep might settle his brains. And so with all haste, they put him to bed.

But the night was as troublesome to him as the day. Wherefore, instead of sleeping, his spirit spent the time in sighs and tears. So when morning was come and they asked him how he was, he told them worse, worse.

He also started to talk to them again, but they began to lose patience. Sometimes they would deride him, sometimes they would chide him, and sometimes they would quite neglect him. So Christian went by himself into the fields, still reading his book, and carrying his burden.

And greatly distressed in his mind, he looked this way and that way, as if he would run, yet he stood still because he couldn't tell which way to go. And then, in the distance, he saw a man approaching. His name was Evangelist.

And he asked Christian, What are you weeping for? Sir, he answered, this book in my hand tells me to flee from the wrath to come. Also, I fear that this burden which is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave. Therefore, I need to get rid of it.

If this is so, said Evangelist, then why are you standing still? Because I don't know where to go, he answered. Then Evangelist pointed with his finger over a wide field. Do you see yonder narrow wicket gate? He asked.

No, said Christian. Then do you see a shining light? I think I do, said Christian. Then said Evangelist, keep that light in your eye and go in that direction, so shall you reach the gate.

There, when you knock, it will be told you what to do. Now, I can imagine someone reading that and saying, clearly, the problem is with that book that he's reading. What he needs to do is stop reading that book.

Just put the book down and move on. That will relieve his distress. This book, Christian said, this book in my hand tells me to flee from the wrath to come.

What is that? The wrath to come. Christian, just put the book down and pick up something a little bit more positive. Something that will make you feel better about life and about yourself.

I mean, why would you want to read that when there are magazines about celebrities and there's romance novels and there's bestsellers and all sorts of fluffy, entertaining things to occupy your attention? Why would you read that book, unless, unless, unless what that book says is what is really true. Unless what that book says is what is really going to happen. And all of the other stuff is designed designed, I mean calculated to distract you and keep you in a make-believe world.

Why would you read such a book unless it was the one thing speaking about reality and your only hope was in paying attention to it and doing what that book told you? Well, the book that Christian is reading, of course, is the Bible. God's Word. And this book of Zephaniah could very easily be the place in God's Word from which Christian is reading.

This book of Zephaniah is this book in miniature. Most of the prophets are like that. In fact, what we're trying to say with this entire conference is that the entire Old Testament is like that.

The Old Testament is pregnant with the message of the Bible. In other words, we could say that the Old Testament is pregnant with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is round with the gospel.

The Old Testament is great with gospel. Now, granted, in the earlier stages of salvation history, in the earlier stages of progressive revelation, the gospel is more difficult to detect. But as salvation history progresses, the shape of and the promise of the gospel becomes more evident.

So as we look throughout the Old Testament, either in its entirety or in its pieces as they progress, we see it is increasingly easy to detect the specific contours and the specific content of the gospel. And that is certainly the case when we get to the prophet Zephaniah. The gospel is here in utero, if you will.

But with all its essential parts in place, it begins with a sober assessment, a sober announcement of the condition of mankind sinning against God. It then pronounces God's righteous judgment on sinful mankind. But in the midst of the pronouncement of judgment, with all of its darkness and all of its gloom and all of its distress and anguish that we're going to see, there comes shining through like a bright ray of light, a word of hope from God.

The word of the good news of salvation from God. Good news for sinful man under the judgment of God and that judgment coming. So that despite God's righteous judgment, there is, because of God's mercy, hope for sinners like us.

And the picture, the picture that Zephaniah paints of where that all ends up is almost beyond the believing. What Zephaniah tells us is that God has provided salvation and not just as an escape from God's judgment, but as an entrance into God's very joy. I don't think it will be too simplistic to say that Zephaniah proceeds in these three steps.

Step one, there appears to be no hope. God's judgment is rightly against all mankind. Step two, there appears a glimmer of hope.

A word of hope is spoken. Step three, that glimmer, that glimmer of hope bursts into a great and glorious rejoicing at the consummation of the salvation of God's people. So let's follow those steps, follow the prophet Zephaniah as he takes these steps, and let's hear the word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, son of Gedalia, son of Amoriah, son of Hezekiah in the days of Josiah, the son of Ammon king.

of Judah. Step one, there appears to be no hope. Chapter one, verse two, I will entirely sweep away everything from the face of the earth, declares the Lord.

I will sweep away man and beast. I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth, declares the Lord.

I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. These opening verses of Zephaniah have got to be some of the most dramatic and silencing opening verses of any book in the Bible. God says, I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth.

Why? It is because of how the people of Judah and the people of other nations were posturing themselves toward God. Let's see how they were posturing themselves toward God. In verse five, we read about those who bow down on the roofs to the hosts of the heavens, those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom.

It looks like the people of Judah were trying to cover all their bases. They were succumbing to cultural pressure. How can your God be the only God, the people around them were saying.

And so they became good religious pluralists. They bowed down to the sun and the stars like those around them. They swore allegiance to the Ammonite God, Milcom.

And oh, they included the Lord too, so as to cover all their bases and not offend anyone. And yet God was very offended. God had said ever so clearly, you shall worship the one true God and Him only.

Listen, worshiping God and something else is not worshiping God at all. They weren't worshiping God, they were patronizing God. And then look at verse six.

Those who have turned back from following the Lord, who do not seek the Lord or inquire of Him. They were pretending, at least in some ways, to believe in God, and yet they were living as practical atheists without reference to Him at all. Listen, we were made for God.

We were made to be in a dependent relationship with God. We were made to trust in Him with all of our hearts and lean not on our own understanding. In all of our ways, acknowledge Him and seek Him and inquire of Him.

We are to say in every situation, God, I want to think about this situation the way you think about this situation. I want to feel about this situation the way you feel about this situation, so that I can act and live in this situation the way that is pleasing to you. How I spend my time, how I spend my money, how I relate to those around me.

But these do not seek the Lord or inquire of Him at all. And then look at verse 12. At that time, I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, the Lord will not do good, nor will He do ill.

Not only were they patronizing God, not only were they neglecting God, but they were trivializing God. They were marginalizing God, saying, He's not really a factor in the equation of our lives. He really doesn't matter one way, do you see this, one way or the other.

What matters is the bottom line of my business. What matters is my reputation in the community. What matters is my comfort at home.

God, if He exists, He's not involved. He doesn't really need to be taken into consideration. We see all this posture of heart captured in chapter 3, verse 2, speaking of Judah and Jerusalem, she listens to no voice.

She accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord. She does not draw near to her God.

The people of Judah are proud and self-sufficient. They think they don't need input from anybody, not even God. And so, Zephaniah, the prophet of God, with the word of God sent by God, comes and says to them, chapter 1, verse 14, the great day of the Lord is near.

Near and hastening fast. The sound of the day of the Lord is bitter. The mighty man cries aloud there.

A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. A day of wrath is coming. Think of what Christian was reading in his book.

Listen, God is God is absolutely just. Zephaniah tells us so, Zephaniah 3, 5. He does no injustice. Every morning he shows forth his justice.

God is absolutely just. He is absolutely holy. So when he sees this rebellion and this pride and this blatant idolatry, he is, there's no other way to say it, he is angry, full of wrath, and he will judge.

You know this happened to Judah. God delivered on this promise. A matter of years after Zephaniah's prophecy, Jerusalem was utterly destroyed.

The Babylonians came, first they attacked, then they invaded the city, and then they took many exiles away from the city. Then they came back and destroyed the city, tore down its walls, demolished the great temple that Solomon had built. Zephaniah probably witnessed that with his own eyes.

But listen, that now historical day of God's judgment on Judah was just a foretaste of the great and terrible day of the Lord that is coming on all unrepentant humanity. What it will be like is described in scripture. It will be a day of anguish and wailing like nothing mankind has seen.

All mankind will be laid bare before the heat of the fire of God's wrath, and those who think that they are safe in their great cities will be absolutely overwhelmed by God. God is holy, and in His holiness He punishes sin. He will bring justice.

If there is no turning, He will bring judgment. He will set things right. All of this judgment is due to one thing.

We see it there in the middle of verse 17, because they have sinned against the Lord. Listen carefully to me. This announcement of judgment is in this book for a reason.

The very first truth about God to be denied. I don't know if you've thought about this. The very first truth about God to be denied.

Do you know what it is? At least according to the record of scripture, the very first truth about God to be denied is the doctrine of God's judgment. Do you remember what the serpent said to Eve? You will not certainly die. We want to think that our neglect of God, we want to think that our sins are minor, we think it's small, that it doesn't matter, that they will have no consequence, so that we are free to do whatever we want, but God says judgment is coming.

I will bring distress on mankind, and this is for all peoples. Look at chapter 3, verse 8. Therefore wait for me, and that's not the waiting of a daddy telling his little girl, wait for me, I'll be home soon. Wait for me, declares the Lord, for the day when I rise up to seize the prey.

For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger, for in the fire of my jealousy all of the earth shall be consumed. Listen, this applies to everybody. God is the greatest reality in the universe, and not just in the universe, but in every person's universe, in your personal world.

So the question is, where has a person put God in their universe? Are you neglecting God? Trusting yourself. Are you patronizing God saying, okay, okay, I'll go to church. Are you trivializing God saying, oh, he doesn't care what I do or how I live.

There will be judgment for all who have neglected or patronized or trivialized God. Destruction is coming, fearful, burning, wailing. I don't know how else to say it.

And verse 18 of chapter 1 makes it very clear that neither your riches, nor your wealth, nor your accomplishments, nor anything else will be able to save you on that day. There will be nothing to hide behind. We tell our children regularly, there's coming a day when you've got to stand alone before God.

You can't stand behind mom and dad. Everything will be laid bare, and God's word is plain. All the earth, all mankind is under that judgment.

Listen, if step one doesn't register for you, if it doesn't strike you as true, you will never even bother to listen to step two and step three. You'll just say, stop reading that book with all its talk of judgment. And if you never hear and respond to step two and step three, you'll be lost forever.

If you are a believer, and the Bible is regularly calling us to consider how it was for you, and how it still would be for you, apart from the grace of God. Lost and without hope in the world. That's step one.

There appears to be no hope. All mankind is under the just and certain judgment of God, step two. Step three.

There appears a glimmer of hope. There appears a glimmer of hope. Do you remember in Pilgrim's Progress when evangelists pointed across that wide field and asked Christian, do you see yonder narrow wicked gate? And Christian said, no, I don't see it.

And evangelist said, then do you see a shining light? And Christian said, I think I do. And evangelist said to him, keep that light in your eye. Just a glimmer, but still a light amid all of this dark, thick gloom.

Look with me at chapter two, verse one. Gather together, yes, gather, oh shameless nation. Notice this repetition, this just relentless repetition.

Before the decree takes effect, before the day passes away like chaff, before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the Lord, seek the Lord, all you humble of the land who do His just commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord.

It seems like such a tiny little glimmer. Perhaps you may be hidden, perhaps you might find refuge. And then as if to heighten and emphasize the narrowness of that ray of hope, this little glimmer is again surrounded by judgment all around.

I mean literally all around. Earlier in chapter one, God's words of judgment were particularly aimed at the people of Judah. But now in chapter two, that judgment is directed to the nations all around Judah as well.

Look at verse four. Judgment will come on the Philistines. Now notice this, to the west.

Judgment will come on Moab and Edom, Amnon, to the east, verse eight. Judgment will come on Cush to the south, verse 12. Judgment will come on Assyria to the north, verse 13.

And as you read those words of judgment in chapter two, and you are at least a little bit kind of familiar with the political geography of the ancient Middle East, you begin to see what God is doing. He is saying in chapter two, yes, I am the Lord of all nations and all nations are accountable to me. But God is also saying, listen Judah, any way you turn, you will run into judgment.

There is no place for you to flee for safety, no way for you to turn, no one to whom to turn that is except one. Only a little glimmer, only a narrow gate, only one place to turn for refuge and salvation, and that is to turn to God Himself. Seek the Lord.

There alone is your hope. Seek the Lord. Perhaps, perhaps you have heard this said before, the glory of the gospel is this, the one from whom we need to be saved is the very one who saves us.

It is true. When you realize that you really do stand guilty before a holy righteous God, when that happens, when that registers for you, when you realize that monumental and fundamental truth, right then there is a temptation in every human heart to kind of turn to all sorts of other refuges, other remedies. I'll go back to church, God.

Okay, you got my attention. I'll stop doing such and such, God. I'll clean up my act.

I'll be better, God. Listen, there is no hope there. There is only one place to turn, and that is to God Himself, who in His mercy provided salvation through Jesus Christ to all who would turn to Him and say, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Save me. That's not some magic formula. No, that is the humbling of your heart.

It is humbly turning to Christ and taking refuge in His death for your sins. It is God's intent to rescue and redeem for Himself a people, a remnant. Look at chapter 3, verse 12.

After speaking about His judgment against the proud, He says, verse 12, But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord. Here is hope.

For those who turn there for refuge, this is what will happen. Step three. Step three, the glimmer of hope will burst into a great and glorious rejoicing at the consummation of the salvation of God's own.

God saves. God does save. That glimmer of hope will burst into a great and glorious rejoicing at the consummation of the salvation of God's own.

A salvation, remember, that is not just an escape from God's judgment, but even more it is an entrance into God's joy. Look with me now again at chapter 3, verse 14. Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion.

Shout, O Israel. Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. 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.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear not, O Zion. Let not your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, the mighty one who will save.

He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love. He will exult over you with loud singing.

Those who have received God's salvation by turning to the Lord, by seeking refuge in his name, and it is clear from scripture that these blessings promised here are not just for the nation of Israel, but are for all of those who through faith in Christ are inheritors of the promise. Remember what Paul says, Galatians chapter 3, verse 29. If you are Christ's, if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring.

Israel heirs according to the promise. And those who have received God's salvation, notice here, they are called to rejoice, to sing. And this isn't some kind of tame singing.

They are called to sing and shout and rejoice with all their hearts. And given what's been done for you, folks, we have every reason to rejoice with all our heart. No experience here on earth that might cause us to shout and rejoice comes anywhere close to this that those who have put their trust in Christ will experience.

And folks, when that is brought to full consummation, you won't be able to not rejoice with all your heart. You see, in this lifetime, we grasp this, the significance of our salvation, only only partially, only vaguely. Now we see through a glass darkly, but then we will see Him.

We will see Him face to face and the full realization of what we have and what God has done will break upon us. And what is it that we will realize then? Look, verse 15, we will fully realize there is no judgment for us at all. Verse 15, the Lord has taken away the judgments against you.

What a beautiful statement of the heart of the gospel right here in this little obscure Old Testament so-called minor prophet. What a beautiful statement of justification. The Lord has taken away the judgments against you.

When He endured the wrath of God for us on the cross, Christ drained the cup of God's wrath bone dry. It was in Him, the fullness of the wrath of God that was poured out. If we are in Christ, all the judgment for our sins was paid, so there remains no judgment for us.

Do the math. And so we sing the judgments of your holy law with me can have nothing to do. My Savior's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.

So we sing all my sins are washed away. And we sing, my sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part, but the whole, has been nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. And then we say, therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

For those who are in Christ, the Lord has taken away the judgments against you. So no judgment. We will realize the full significance of that then.

And secondly, we'll realize the amazing experience of being, being in God's very presence. Look again there at the middle of verse 15. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst.

You shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, fear not, O Zion, let not your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty one who will save.

And thirdly, we will realize there will no longer be any reason for fear of any kind. I wonder what that's going to be like. No reason, no experience of fear.

Because, well, there's no judgment and your all-powerful king is right there in your midst. You shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, fear not, O Zion, let not your hands grow weak.

The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. Zephaniah wants the people of God, God wants those who are his own, to see these things, to get a glimpse of them, so that by getting at least a little glimpse of this, we might be strengthened and encouraged as we follow God now. But, clearly, what Zephaniah marvels at the most, and what he holds up for us to marvel at, is the amazing prospect.

More amazing, as amazing as these other things are, more amazing even than that, what Zephaniah holds up for us and wants us to marvel at, is the amazing prospect of God rejoicing in love over us on that day. Having rescued and redeemed a people for his very own, when that work of redemption is done, and now all whom God has saved, people from every tribe, every tongue, every nation, are gathered, are brought in. Do you see that there in verse 20? At that time, I will bring you in, at that time when I gather you together.

When that happens, will God look out over us and somehow be disappointed in the fruit of his saving work? Will he look out over us and think, well, given what I had to work with, well, it is what it is. No. He tells us, and don't miss that, he put it in this book, he wants us to know, he tells us that on that day, he will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will exult over you with loud singing. He will have perfectly completed his purpose to make us spotless and without blemish, and so his rejoicing in his work will be right, and please do not miss the unrestrained intensity of God's passion. He will rejoice, he will exult, his singing will be loud.

There is an intensity of passion in the heart of God. He said, he will say. I don't do this reluctantly.

I'm not doing this begrudgingly. There is no, no constraint involved here at all. As the prophet Isaiah says, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God shall rejoice over you. Not long ago, I was in a conversation with a woman from our church, and I was actually wanting to thank her and commend her for the influence that she is in our church, and so I was going about doing that, and before long in the conversation, she kind of grabbed the reins of the conversation, and she began to commend my wife to me. Now, please don't misunderstand, my purpose here is not to call attention to my wife, I just want to illustrate.

This woman was describing my wife to me. She had been in conversation with Beverly a few days before, she had gotten to know Beverly over the last several months and years, and she was now speaking to me, describing my wife to me in glowing terms. It wasn't a token thing, she went on for quite a while, and I made absolutely no attempt to stop her.

All that while, as I listened, my heart was full of joy. There was a great gladness in my heart, I wasn't the least envious, I was delighting, out of love for my wife, in what was being said, my heart was full of joy. Listen, if you are in Christ, that's how God feels about you.

As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so shall your God rejoice over you only a million times more, and one day, here's what Zephaniah tells us, one day when he brings us in, when he gathers us together, that rejoicing that God holds in his heart for you right now will break forth and you will experience the most incredible thing you've ever experienced, I don't care what you've experienced in this lifetime, you might have stood on the summits of the highest mountains of all seven continents. This is going to make all of the moving and thrilling and delightful experiences you've ever had seem like nothing. God will greatly rejoice over you.

Yes, you will rejoice, but even greater than your joy will be God's joy. Listen to Spurgeon. Believer, you are happy when God blesses you, but not as happy as God is.

You are glad when you are pardoned, but he who pardons you is more glad. The prodigal son come back to his home was very happy to see his father, but not as delighted as his father was to see him. The father's heart was more full of joy because his heart was larger than his son's.

Folks, God's heart is bigger than ours. Because of Christ, God's heart is completely for us, and his heart is large. This book of Zephaniah is here to let us know as hard as it is for us to fathom this, when God's work of redemption is done and we are gathered with him and all of his own are gathered there, when he has brought us in, God himself will stand and will break forth in singing and will rejoice over us with all his heart, he will sing I have betrothed you to me forever.

I have betrothed you to me in righteousness and justice, in steadfast love and mercy. You are mine and we will say, and you are our God. He will sing I have cleansed you from all guilt and I have forgiven all your sin and you shall be a joy and a praise and a glory to me and we will say, who is a pardoning God like you? He will sing, I will make you dwell in safety and you will be my people and I will be your God and I will rejoice in doing you good with all my heart and soul and we will say, whom have we in heaven but you? And he will sing over us again and again, you are mine you are mine you are mine and he will rejoice over us with gladness and exult over us with loud singing and we will be radiant over the goodness of the Lord and we will feast on his abundance and we will be satisfied in his love.

Well, let me conclude with something of a footnote of pastoral encouragement. You know, we have these conversations about the exact content of the gospel. What is the gospel? What must it include when we share it? What must it include when we preach it? And I believe these have been very helpful conversations.

I'm very grateful for them. They've been helpful and clarifying for me. They have been so useful.

I'm thankful to the men who have led us in these conversations. But may I say this morning that our thoughts of the gospel, our preaching of the gospel, our personal treasuring of the gospel should always include this. This consummation.

The vision of God's joy over his people. Certainly this must be included. The end to which it's all moving.

Certainly we can't leave out the aim, the goal, the consummation of it all. This is the whole point. Being with God and experiencing his joy to his right glory.

This is the great point of it all, isn't it? And this, I believe, is the great contribution of Zephaniah. This vision of the consummation of the redeeming work of God in Christ. Sometimes I'm afraid that we forget to speak about this great consummation.

But it needs to be spoken. It doesn't work as an unstated assumption. There is something existentially very unsatisfying about that.

It must be spoken, and that's exactly what Zephaniah does here. And I am eager that our preaching of the gospel, both our preaching of it to others and our preaching of it to ourselves, not leave this out. And may we as God's people see it and hear it and treasure it until it fills our hearts with eagerness and our souls with an anticipation of all this joy.

To Christ's glory. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for telling us this. Thank you that you've told us about your holiness. Thank you that you've told us about your mercy.

Thank you for revealing your Son to us. His sinless life and his substitutionary death and his resurrection. But Father, thank you for showing us this picture as well.

And I pray Lord, that it would cause faith and hope and love to rise in our hearts to the glory of Christ. Amen.

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