

Zephaniah

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 - b. I Gather together, gather yourselves together, you shameful nation, 2 before the decree takes effect and that day passes like windblown chaff, before the Lord’s fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord’s wrath comes upon you. 3 Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger. (Zephaniah 2:1-3)

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 - a. Christ, be with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.

Zephaniah

¹The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah:

²"I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.

³"I will sweep away both man and beast; I will sweep away the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea — and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble."

"When I destroy all mankind on the face of the earth," declares the LORD, ⁴"I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will destroy every remnant of Baal worship in this place, the very names of the idolatrous priests —⁵those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molek,⁶those who turn back from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him."

⁷Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near.

The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited.

⁸"On the day of the LORD's sacrifice I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all those clad in foreign clothes. ⁹On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit.

¹⁰"On that day," declares the LORD, "a cry will go up from the Fish Gate, wailing from the New Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills. ¹¹Wail, you who live in the market district; all your merchants will be wiped out, all who trade with^a silver will be destroyed. ¹²At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.' ¹³Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished. Though they build houses, they will not live in them; though they plant vineyards, they will not drink the wine."

¹⁴The great day of the LORD is near — near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. ¹⁵That day will be a day of wrath — a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness — ¹⁶a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers.

¹⁷"I will bring such distress on all people that they will grope about like those who are blind, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like dung. ¹⁸Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath." In the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.

^{2:1}Gather together, gather yourselves together, you shameful nation, ²before the decree takes effect and that day passes like windblown chaff, before the LORD's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the LORD's wrath comes upon you. ³Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger.

Introduction

For the past 8 weeks we have focused on many things that remind us that God is with us and we are not alone. Back in March when we initially had to stop meeting together face to face as a church body we used the remaining weeks of Lent and Resurrection Sunday to focus on ebenezers, stones of helping that remind us that God has brought us thus far so we are able to trust that He will continue to help us move forward. After that we finish those weeks on ebenezers we turned back to our series on the Apostles John's epistles which remind us that we are loved by the God Who is love. Then last week we read the prophet Obadiah and were reminded that the Day of the Lord is a day when God will rescue His people. But there is more to the Day of the Lord.

Let me begin with a story. When I turned 16 my mother checked me out of school early and took me to the Alabama Department of Motor Vehicles for me to take my Driver's License test. When I past it we drove back home and my mother told me I could drive around and go see my friends who were now out off school. I had a school dance that I was supposed to drive some friends to that evening because my car had bench seats in the front and the back and thus even though it was a two door car it could hold as many people in it as a modern minivan. I planned to drive around show some friends that I had passed and could now drive around and then come back home to get ready for the dance that evening.

When I got home my mom and dad sat me down and began to walk me through each stop that I had made. Who I had visit and when that visit had taken place.

- At 3 pm you were here.

- At 3:30 you were here
- At 4:15 you were here
- Etc., Etc. Etc.

If you can imagine the conversation you might be able to picture the shock that was on my face. I couldn't believe they knew every place that I had been. Mom and dad then said "we're telling you this so that you know we know people all over this city and they know you are our son. If you get in trouble and need help we will know about it and if you just plain get in trouble we will also know about that."

This really came into focus when I was doing something dangerous. I had a tendency to race home from school with several friends. This was incredibly foolish and dangerous on my part. It stopped when I decided to cut through the parking lot of a Kmart and looked up to see my dad staring at me as I sped across the parking lot. When I needed help it was amazing to know that my parents were there for me, BUT when I did something wrong, or in this case very dangerous, my parents being with me meant that I was about to be in serious trouble.

God With Us

God is with us. That is what the very name Immanuel means. It is one of the benefits of being the people of God. We know that God dwells in our midst, that we dwell in His. When the Israelites would make camp during their wanderings the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, where the Israelites would go to meet with God, was placed in the center of the campsite. Their "city planning" was based around recognizing that God was with them in the center of their camp. God being with us is a great comfort when we are in trouble but a holy terror when we are the ones making the trouble. Because if God is with you then there is no hiding what you have done. 😊 You are in relationship with God and that relationship means closeness both in your time of need and when you would rather not be caught.

The prophet Zephaniah does something similar with the people of God. To be in covenant relationship means that God is with you in your times of trouble, but it also means that He expects you to act like you are in a relationship with Him. He expects you to act like the people of God.

Zephaniah & The Day of the Lord

Let's begin by talking about Zephaniah and the time period in which he was a prophet.

Zephaniah was a prophet during the last days of Judah, the Southern Kingdom of Israel. He prophesied during the reign of King Josiah. Josiah was a king who tried to follow God and tried to strike a revival in Judah in following Yahweh. The people of Judah had turned their backs on Yahweh and were following the Baals and the Ashtoreths and Josiah worked to bring the people back to worship God and God alone. Unfortunately, the people of God had turned their backs on God for far too long and we going to need judgement to bring their attention back to Yahweh. The So, Zephaniah preaches of the day of the Lord. In fact, he talks more about th day of the Lord than any other prophet in the Old Testament.

The day of the Lord is the day of God's deliverance and judgement. The Exodus is probably the best example we have of the Day of the Lord. In the Exodus God saves His people but He also judges the evil that was done to His people. Israel is freed and Pharaoh is punished. These are two side of the same coin that is known as the day of the Lord. And Israel was instructed to remember this Day of the Lord so that they would be prepared for the Day of the Lord that would come in the end. The day in which God would finalize His rescue and judgement. So each year Israel gathered, and still does, in their homes to enact a reminder of the day in which the Lord forbid the destroyer from entering the homes of those who trusted in Him. Those who recognized that God was with them were saved and those who trusted in the power of Pharaoh were destroyed on that day.

But unfortunately Israel forget that there is another aspect to being the people of God and we who have been grafted¹ onto their faith still forget this aspect too. To have God be with us during a storm is a great comfort. To know that the Creator of the universe has claimed us as His is a strong assurance when we face a pandemic. God with us states that our hope is with us and it is easy for us to long for the day of the Lord, the day of his deliverance.

Another prophet makes this very clear. Amos write the following:

"You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins." (Amos 3:2)

God specifically says in the passage "I have chosen you and therefore I will punish you for your sins". God expects us to live as His people and His judgement comes out of expecting us to live as His people. They go hand in hand. We receive the comfort of knowing that God is with us BUT that comfort comes with the expectation that we care for the things that God cares for, we love the things that God loves, and we fight for the things that God would fight for. When you have been chosen by God you are supposed to live out the faith that you have been chosen with.

"See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright —but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness" (Habbakuk 2:4)

The enemy lives off his pride and desires but the people of God are to live out their faith.

So Zephaniah declares that the day of the Lord is coming in judgement against Judah. He declares the day of the Lord against them because they thought they could be God's people and not do God's actions, and worse they thought He wouldn't do anything about it. To quote Zephaniah:

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.' (Zephaniah 1:12)

¹ [Romans 11:17-24](#)

But God is the God Who acts. He is the God Who will judge evil no matter where it comes from. Even when it comes from His own people.

So, He calls His people to repent. To quote Zephaniah again:

¹ Gather together, gather yourselves together, you shameful nation, ² before the decree takes effect and that day passes like windblown chaff, before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's wrath comes upon you. ³ Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger. (Zephaniah 2:1-3)

Repentance is the correct response to hearing that the day of the Lord is approaching. We repent because we are God's people. We repent because we have not acted like God's people. We repent for we have acted unjustly and we have allowed injustice. We repent from the evil we have done and the evil we have allowed. Because being God's people also means that we must act as God's people. We are in a covenant relationship with us. He has promised to be our God, but He expects us to live as His people.

The Justice of the People of God

I bring this up because this week in the midst of a pandemic there was a news story big enough to break through all the pandemic news and remind us that we live in a fallen world that is longing for God's justice. This week the US, at least briefly, remembered the name Ahmaud Arbery. I couldn't help thinking of Arbery as I was doing my own run yesterday. I kept on thinking about the fact that we live in a world where I could run through a secluded neighborhood and see people that I did not know and never once worry about them being a threat to me or worry about them viewing me as a threat to them. Yet for approximately 1 out of 4 citizens of the USA that isn't true. This isn't just. When God spoke through the prophet Amos that he desired that "let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:24) I believe this is part of what He meant. I believe God was calling His people to see His image in all those around them and respond to that image.

When we see other as less than we fail to see the image of God in them and I believe this hurts the Lord. When we think one group is more important than another group, we fail to see the image of God in them and I believe this hurts the Lord. It was the other Ancient Near Eastern peoples who thought that one group was more important than another. This is the mindset of the Baals and Moleks. They were the groups who said in their theology that only their kings and queens bore the image of God. They believed that some people were created with the image of god and therefore of value while others were not and are of less or no value. When this is your view it is ok to sacrifice others because they do not bear the image of God. It is okay to exclude and ignore them because they are not like you. But the people of God had a different creation story.

Israel's theology was completely. The creation story of the Bible teaches that humanity, all of it, bears the image of God. When you see your neighbor, regardless of their race, gender, or creed you see one who was created in the image of the Lord. Our neighbors have value because of the God we serve Who we believe created them as well as us. When we see them, we cannot help but respond to the image of our Creator in them. We must respond in love and generosity. That's what happens when you realize God is there with you. You begin to love the things that He loves.

So what do we do? I believe we put on our Jesus glasses. I hope this never happens to any of you, though I know it already has for some, but often as you get older your eyesight goes. Mine is at a point where when I wake up in the morning I can't read the smaller numbers on my watch without my glasses. If my phone rings in the middle of the night since I am on call 24/7 I definitely can't read what my phone is saying without my glasses. It has made for some interested answers because I am struggling to get my glasses on and answer the phone before it stops ringing. I need these glasses to see the world they way it actually is. Without my glasses my vision is so distorted that I can't really see the world the way it is. We need God to constantly reshape our vision of the world around us.

Conclusion

Many of you have heard me reference a prayer form around the 5th century. It is called Patrick's Breastplate because it is believe that the man of God used it to start his day off. He prays many things in the prayer of which one part is that he would recognize Jesus's presence all around him. This section of the prayer goes as follow:

Christ, be with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.

Part of this is a recognition that Christ is with him and before him, in him, and in the others that he sees and experiences. But I believe part of this is also a request for Jesus to help Patrick to see that Christ is present in those same individuals. The warped perspective of the world is that some are more important than others. That some have more value while others have less. But the perspective of Jesus is that all bear the image of God and should be treated as such. You see I believe part of what Patrick was doing was begging God to help Him to see the world as Jesus sees the world. To see God's reality.

I believe Patrick was praying "help me to see Jesu in the person on my right, and the person on my left. In every person who thinks of me and every person who speaks of me. Help me to see Jesus in them and respond to Him." He is placing these prayer "glasses" on to enable him to see in the manner in which Jesus sees. Perhaps we should rephrase the language for ourselves.

"God help me to see Jesus in every person who is similar to me, and every person that is different from me. Help me to see Jesus in the person who has the same skin color as I do and the person whose skin color and culture may be different than mine. Help me to see Jesus in the one with whom I agree and within the one with whom I disagree. Help me to see Jesus in the one who votes for the same candidate as I do, and the person who votes for the candidate with whom I completely disagree, and in the person who just simply refuses to vote. Help me to see Jesus in everyone around me and cause me to declare how worth the image of God in them is by the manner in which I treat them."

I believe that how we view our neighbors around us is one of the things that this pandemic is going to very negatively affect. The people around us can now be viewed even more as a danger. We have to fight to make sure the first thing we see when we look at someone else is the image of God and to respond to that image.