

Zephaniah 3

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[0 : 00] Good evening. It's great to be with you all this evening. It's a great blessing to be here. My wife Brianna and our daughter Abigail who's just nine months old flew across the pond and landed in Heathrow airport 6 a.m Friday morning and we're pretty much recovered from our jet lag not quite getting there but I look forward to meeting many of you and attending catalyst.

Later this week. The title of this message is My Father's Joy and you can see it if you have your Bible open to Zephaniah chapter 3. You can see it right there in verse 17. The Lord will rejoice over you with gladness. He will exalt over you with loud singing.

I think it's safe to say that most of the time when we think of Christian joy we think about ourselves as the subject of that joy. We are the ones rejoicing at the coming of the Messiah and that's quite good but we are actually going to look from a different perspective this evening.

We are going to focus on God's joy. We are going to focus on God's joy. And this is quite a special message for me. My daughter's name Abigail is Hebrew. It comes from two Hebrew words.

Abigail. And it means my father's joy. My father's joy. My father rejoices. My father's joy. And that second word, gail, from Abigail, Abigail, is the word in verse 17 of our text.

[1 : 57] And that last line, exalt. The Lord will exalt over you with loud singing. The Lord will gail. It means to shout in joyous exaltation.

So point one that I want us to gather from this text is that joy is first and foremost an attribute of God. It is part of his essential character as God.

Zephaniah 3:17. God will rejoice. And if we just stop there without even noting the particular object of that joy, God does rejoice and always has for all eternity.

Before the universe existed, in eternity past, there was nothing but the glory of the eternal and triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwelling in glory.

Psalms 90, verse 2. Before the mountains were born and before you had formed the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. And there was joy. And there was joy. The triune God, in and of himself, as part of his own essential character as God, is and always has been joyful.

[3 : 20] Now, God does have an object to his joy in Zephaniah 3, verse 17. We'll get to that. But we could ask, what was the object of God's joy in eternity past, before the heavens and the earth existed?

What is the cause, the object, the reason for God's joy before the universe existed? The answer is that the object of God's eternal delight and joy is himself.

The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy himself forever. Or, to put it another way, the chief end of God is to enjoy glorifying himself.

This may sound strange to some, as good confessional Presbyterians. I'm sure many of you know why we exist. Westminster Shorter Catechism, question one.

What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. That's right. But why does God exist? What should God love with all his heart, his soul, his mind, and his strength?

[4 : 43] Another way to put this, perhaps even a little stranger to our ears, whom does God worship? Or would we try to deny him that highest pleasure?

Since God is unique as the most glorious of all beings, totally self-sufficient, infinitely admirable in beauty, power, and wisdom, it would be idolatry if God did not have infinite enjoyment in his own greatness.

Of course, Herman Bavinck said this, God is his own blessedness. Blessedness and God are the same. God is fully aware of his own perfection, and he supremely loves it.

That is, rests peacefully in it. And from this rest springs joy. The joy with which God delights in himself as the supreme good.

The point is this, God supremely delights in his own glory. Thomas Aquinas said, Every desire is set at rest by happiness, because once it is possessed, nothing remains to be desired.

[6 : 01] Every desire is set at rest by happiness, because once it is possessed, nothing remains to be desired.

This makes perfect sense. When you desire something really badly, like so bad it's uncomfortable, you just have to have it, it's all you can think about.

When that desire is finally fulfilled, there's rest, there's peace, because nothing remains to be desired.

Aquinas said, Accordingly, God must be happy, since he is perfect in all things that can be desired. As long as a person lacks that which they need, they're not yet happy.

For their desire is not yet set at rest. Therefore, the one who is self-sufficient, the one who needs nothing is happy. God needs not other things, since his perfection depends on nothing outside of himself.

[7 : 07] Therefore, he is happy. And we can get even more specific about this joy of God. The joy of the triune God is that the Father eternally delights in the Son through the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 3.17, the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descends upon the Son, and the Father says, This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

John 17.24, Jesus prays to his Father, Father, I desire that they also whom you have given may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Jesus said, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. Saint Augustine put it like this, Between the Holy Spirit and the Father and the Son, there is a co-eternal communion.

And I love this. He says, And if it may be fitly called friendship, let it be so called, but it is more aptly called love. So point one, although not explicit, implicit, and foundational to this text in Zephaniah, joy is first and foremost an attribute of God.

[8 : 37] Specifically, the persons of the triune God, three persons, one God, one God, three persons, have eternally existed in this mutually embracing union of joy and delight and love in one another's glory as the fullness of God.

Point number two that I want us to consider from this text in Zephaniah is that Zephaniah 3, 14 to 20, is a prophetic proclamation that the Lord is coming.

It is a declaration of the Lord's future advent, his future arrival from the vantage point in the 7th century BC during the reign of King Josiah.

It is a call to worship. The first verse, sing aloud, shout, rejoice, and exult. It is a call to worship for two things, redemption for God's people and the enthronement of God himself as a king, as the king.

Verse 15, the Lord has taken away the judgments against you, the judgments against God's people, necessary because of their sin, have been taken away.

[10 : 02] God has removed them and when God removes the punishment, he forgives the sin. And number two, God has cleared away the enemies of his people and he himself is in their midst as the king of Israel.

This text, this prophetic proclamation, is fulfilled when the Lord does come in the person of Jesus Christ. Luke chapter 1, verse 30, the angel says to Mary, Do not be afraid.

You have found favor with God. You will conceive and bear a son. You shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.

And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom, there will be no end. But, it is very surprising how this king will come.

If you have your Bibles open to Zephaniah chapter 3, you can keep a finger in Zephaniah and begin to turn some pages to the right. The book immediately following Zephaniah is Haggai, which is quite short.

[11 : 24] And then you'll quickly get to Zechariah. And if you go to Zechariah chapter 9, verse 9, with your finger still in Zephaniah, you will see that the language here in Zechariah 9, 9 is strikingly similar.

I'll read both. Zephaniah 3, 14, Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O Israel. Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

The King of Israel, the Lord is in your midst. And then Zechariah 9, 9. Rejoice greatly. O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Behold, your King is coming to you. Very similar. And then, humble and mounted on a donkey. Humble, which is the exact opposite of what you would expect of a king. And so this inner biblical connection, if we can call it that, between Zephaniah and Zechariah, bring into view the humility.

[12:30] Theologians have called it the humiliation of Jesus, the King of Israel. Luke 2. Joseph takes his pregnant wife, Mary, and they go from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered for a census.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.

Ironic, isn't it, that the maker of the universe in all of its vast immensity couldn't get a room?

The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the maker of heaven and earth, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the second person of the Trinity, the only begotten Son, the radiance of the Father's glory is born in a feeding trough outside, probably not made of wood as is often depicted in our Christmas imagery, but probably hallowed out of the ground where the animals were kept.

I think I'm now able to appreciate this, birth of Jesus, with a whole new depth after watching my own wife give birth to our daughter nine months ago. It would have been uncomfortable enough for someone to try to sleep in a manger, but imagine trying to give birth in such a place.

[14:03] And for the first time, Dr. Kent Hughes vividly imagines the scene in his commentary on Luke. He says, sweat and pain and blood and cries as Mary reached up to the heavens for help.

The earth was cold and hard. The smell of birth mixed with the stench of manure and acrid straw made a contemptible bouquet. Trembling carpenter's hands, clumsy with fear, grasped God's son slippery with blood.

The baby's limbs waving helplessly as if falling through space, his face grimacing as he gasped in the cold and his cry pierced the night.

In order to take away the judgments against us, the King of Israel, the Lord, undergoes pain, humiliation, rejection, which will culminate in death on a cross.

So when you read this glorious ending, and it is glorious, to the prophetic book Zephaniah, I will gather those of you who mourn so that you will no longer suffer.

[15:20] I will save the lame and gather the outcast. I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time, I will bring you in at the 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.

That is a promise purchased for God's people, the church, by the obedience and suffering of Jesus Christ.

Thomas Watson said of Jesus, He was poor that He might make us rich. He was born of a virgin that we might be born of God. He took our flesh that He might give us His spirit.

He lay in a manger that we might lie in paradise. He came down from heaven that He might bring us to heaven.

[16:23] The New Testament equivalent to Zephaniah 3:17 really is Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

And here it is. Here it is. Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus Christ is Lord. He is the King of Israel. And He rejoiced because He saw the crown beyond the cross.

He saw the purchase of His blood, the church, that would be His bride forever. forever. And so Zephaniah chapter 3 really does bring into view the glory of the gospel that God takes sinners who are objects of His wrath and He transforms them to His rejoicing objects of His joy.

It's an incredible thing 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.

[18:02] I will cut all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and I will cut off from this place those who have turned back from following the Lord who do not seek the Lord or inquire of Him.

Wow. And yet the book ends the Lord has taken away the judgments against you. He has cleared away your enemies. You shall never again fear evil.

The Lord your God is in your midst a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will be quiet in His love.

He will exalt over you with loud singing. That second to last line there of verse so back to Zephaniah chapter 3 verse 17. That second to last line is difficult if you take a look at Zephaniah 3 17.

It depends on what version of the Bible you're reading. The ESV has He will quiet you by His love. But I think the CSB and the King James actually do quite a nice job with this translation.

[19:14] The CSB says He will be quiet in His love. He will rest in His love. Probably some apprehension because what does it mean for God to be quiet in His love?

It sounds strange. What does it mean for God to be silent in His love for you? One scholar put it like this, silence in His love is an expression used to show love deeply felt which is absorbed in its object with thoughtfulness and admiration and forms the correlation to rejoicing with exaltation which is the loud demonstration of one's love.

So you see here in verse 17 really the beauty of Hebrew poetry. These two phrases form this pairing these opposites to God's love.

John Calvin put it this way, God then shall be at rest in His love. That is it will be His great delight it will be the chief pleasure which is you as one cherishes a wife most dear to Him.

So God will then rest in His love. I mentioned before how Thomas Aquinas said every desire is set at rest by happiness because once it is possessed nothing remains to be desired.

[20:44] And we considered just a moment ago how the triune God exists in this perfect joy. The Father delights in the perfections of the Son of God through the Holy Spirit.

What Jesus does for sinners who are under God's wrath He brings them into that very communion of joy and love.

Conversions of the nations. The conversion of the nations. Verse 9 11. Verse 11! That is transformative regeneration that takes the heart of a sinner, removes their guilt, and reorients them toward the worship of the one true God.

Verse 11, on that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me.

The reason for his own glory, for his own joy. Verse 17, the Lord your God is a mighty one who will save. That is the real grounds of confidence.

[22:08] For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall you. 19 to 20, and I will betroth you to me forever, says the Lord. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.

I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord. And so this ending to the book of Zephaniah really is a call to worship.

As the prophet breaks out in an exhortation to praise, sing aloud, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O Israel. Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

This is not quiet reflection. This is praise of the living God that is exuberant and boisterous. And when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, your Lord, your supremely valuable treasure, your guilt, your shame, your rebellion, it is remover of your Father's joy.

I want to end by reading a paragraph from C.S. Lewis' *The Weight of Glory* that I think really captures this.

[23:29] Lewis says this. I can imagine someone saying that he dislikes my idea of heaven as a place where we are patted on the back.

But this is a misunderstanding. In the end, that face of God, which is the delight or the terror of the universe, must be turned upon each of us, either with one expression or the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised.

I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. But by God himself, it is not. How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important.

Indeed, how we think of him is of no importance, except insofar as it is related to how he thinks of us. It is written that we shall stand before him, shall appear, shall be inspected by him.

The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God.

[24 : 58] To please God. To be a real ingredient in the divine happiness. To be loved by God. Not merely pitied, but delighted in.

As an artist delights in his work, or a father, his son. It seems impossible. A weight or burden of glory, which our thoughts can hardly sustain.

But so it is. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, Lord God, would you teach us to delight in Jesus as you do?

Teach us to delight in the greatness and beauty and worth of our Savior as you do. It is our desire that we would be made glad with the very gladness of the Son of God himself.

Continue to impress upon us that when you invite us to heaven in the gospel, you welcome us not simply to a happy heaven, but into the very experience of your own joy.

[26 : 16] Would you do this for your glory, we pray. For Christ's sake, amen.