

The God Who Sings Zephaniah 3:14-20

Introduction

How do you think God thinks about you? How does the holy, all-powerful, all-knowing God feel about you? My goal is to give you something to hold onto as we experience another divisive election season, continued civil unrest, and any anxiety you may be experiencing about an uncertain tomorrow. What I want to say in this sermon is like the epilogue of a great story; Romans was the great story we concluded last week; however, my sermon today is about the details of the “happily ever after” the gospel promises all whose faith rests in Jesus Christ.

The prophet Zephaniah warns of God’s coming judgment that will come upon both Israel, as well as the nations that surround her. The prophet also shares a promise from God that a day is coming when Israel will experience restoration that the King of Israel will bring one day. This promise is mentioned in the last seven verses of Zephaniah; the apex of the promise is found in verse 17, “**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**” (Zephaniah 3:17).

There are four things that are promised to a restored Israel that is true of all of God’s people whose faith and trust rest in the King of Israel:

1. Yahweh will live among his people.
2. Yahweh is a mighty warrior who fights for his people.
3. Yahweh will restore his people.
4. Yahweh will delight in his people.
5. Yahweh will sing over his people.

The only people who will experience Yahweh on this level will be those who sought refuge in him for the salvation of their souls (vv. 11-13). Jesus is the King of Israel that Zephaniah refers to in 3:17 (see Matt. 27:42; Mark 15:32; John 1:49). The NIV translates verse 17 a little differently: “**The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing**” (Zephaniah 3:17, NIV). Which is it? Will God, “*quiet you by his love*” or “*in his love... no longer rebuke you*”? The Hebrew word for “*quiet*” can also be translated “*hold*”; I think the point being made is that God will forgive and restore his people through his love.

What Zephaniah states that when the King comes, “...**you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me.... But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD...**” (3:11, 12). Micah 7:8-9 is a helpful passage that captures the tone of what Zephaniah is promising: “**Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord**

will be my light. Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the Lord's wrath, until he pleads my case and upholds my cause. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness" (Micah 7:8–9, NIV).

In fact, I will even go as far to say that Zephaniah 3:15 is the equivalent to the promise of no condemnation in Romans 8:1, "***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***" (Zephaniah 3:15). What is being promised is the kingdom of God on earth for his people. On that day when the kingdom of God is fully realized and experienced by his people, his people will know what it means in a very tangible way to have Yahweh rejoice and sing over his people. What I would like to do with the remainder of our time together is to explore what that kingdom will be like.

God will Sing Over His People Through the Giving of His Kingdom

When Jesus comes back, God will rejoice over us through the peace only Jesus can bring on earth. During this time, the earthly reign of Jesus on earth will bring the type of peace where, "**The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox**" (Isa. 11:6-7). We are told that when the kingdom is given to the people of God, "**The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. ⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea**" (vv. 8-9).

Yet, we are told that Jesus' reign and rule on earth will be for a thousand years in that it will be long but not permanent. The kingdom of God will be full, but not complete. Why? Because while there will be peace on earth during this time, it will not be completely free from the curse of sin, for there will be two types of human beings, those who have been given new glorified perfect bodies that are untainted by sin. Those who are called the Bride of Christ will belong to the first category of human being. We will have physical bodies that are perfect, pure, and supernatural. We will dwell and have positions of authority as members of Jesus' world dominating kingdom.

The other type of human on earth during Christ's 1000-year reign will be those who did not worship the beast or bow to the antichrist. Life for these human beings will be similar to what we experience today, but in total and complete peace. Life will be good for these people because instead of being under the authority of a president, prime minister, tyrant, or emperor they will be under the authority of a perfect and good King. The Bible describes this time in the following way: "**He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD**" (Isaiah 2:4-5).

God Will Sing Over His People Through the Giving of a New Creation

Although the reign of Christ for one thousand years on earth will be amazing and perfectly wonderful, God is saving the best of his singing for what will come after Jesus' reign on this present earth. When God makes all things new, Earth will not be the earth as we know it today. The New Earth will not be new in the way you trade in your used car so that you can afford a new one. The new earth will be new in the same way Jesus' resurrected body was new. The Bible tells us that, **“the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed”** (2 Pet. 3:10).

The way that God will rejoice over his people on the new earth is that he will usher in for his people an experience where sin is not permitted, goodbye is unnecessary, and boring will be inconceivable. On the day the kingdom of God will only be inherited by the people of God and **“...everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away”** (35:10). Wherever God is, heaven is present, and where God is present... an unending, eternal climax of joy will be the reality of all those whose faith and hope rested in Jesus. Of this place, Jesus encourages us with these words: **“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom”** (Luke 12:32).

When heaven and earth become the same place and the Kingdom of God becomes a permanent relation, God will wipe away our tears: **“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away”** (21:4). The rejoicing and singing of God over his people will be experienced on a level not enjoyed since Adam and Eve were able to look upon the face of God in the Garden before their great and horrible sin, for we are told that on the new earth, we will see the face of God (Rev. 22:4).

The people of God will forever be known as the Bride of Christ. The end of our story will be the beginning of a new chapter that will continue without the threats that come under the cloak of darkness. For all of eternity we will experience the loud singing of the love of our God where the good we will know will never crest nor will it recede. The happiness we will know on that day that begins with the reign of Christ on the old earth and will continue on the new earth will not be, as Sam Storms so aptly wrote: “...like the steady, placid state of a mountain lake where barely a ripple disturbs the tranquility of its water.” Instead, our joy on the new earth will be, ...more akin to the surging, swelling waves of the Mississippi at flood stage. With each passing day there is an increase in the level of water. And as the rain of revelation and insight and discovery continues to fall throughout the endless ages of eternity, so the water level of love and joy and happiness rises higher and higher, never to abate or to any degree diminish.... The heavenly river of revelation will never crest! The waters of our enjoyment will suffer no such limitations.¹

To his disciples and to his followers today, Jesus promises us a better tomorrow: **“Fear not, little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom”** (Luke 12:32). When the King of Israel comes, we will never again fear evil. On that day, we are promised by our singing

¹ Sam Storms. *One Thing*. (Great Brittan: Christian Focus Publications, 2004) p. 170.

and rejoicing God: **“I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame”** (v. 19; NIV).

Application

On Christmas, my father and mother went out of their way to make each year more memorable than the previous year. In the middle of the night on Christmas eve, my mother would wake us up to the sound of hoof-beat sounds on the roof. She would wake us up to tell us that Santa Clause had stopped by our house... then he would come into our room to give my brother and I a kiss. On Christmas morning we would wake up to find a room surrounded by gifts around the fresh pine tree. Every year it seems that we would receive an electric car race track that outdid the track we received the year before. All morning my brother and I would play with my father, taking turns racing our cars around the track he not only purchased for us but built to look like the most epic track ever.

Do you know why I remember those Christmas eves and mornings? It is not because I believe in Santa Clause; it is because the love of my mother and father was tangible. It was as if I could hear in an experiential kind of way my mother and father rejoicing over me with gladness. On Christmas morning, it was as if my parents exulted over us with the opening of each carefully wrapped gift around the fresh pine tree. Christmas for my mother and father was a time for my parents to sing over us, not because they felt obligated, but because they loved us.

My dear brothers and sisters, Christmas is coming! The kingdom of God is growing, and will one day burst into a new creation where we will see God face to face and will know the reality of Zephaniah in the fullest possible way:

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. (vv. 17-18)

What will Christmas really look like on the day when creation is restored and heaven and earth are one?

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1–5)