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Zephaniah

Chapter 1 – Hidden Things

Hidden Danger and Indignation

When we come to the book of Zephaniah, as his name means *whom the Lord hides*. So, an appropriate book as we begin to see that God is declaring at the very beginning of this chapter *everything has to go*. You go, “Well, what about the things that aren't visible?” He goes, “That stuff too, especially.” Because these are the hidden things, these are the things that really latch on to us in a very strange way. So, we're going to be talking about those hidden things that we've allowed to come into our lives, and we perceive that because they aren't visible, that they're not offensive; but that couldn't be further from the truth. First of all, we have a God that can see and knows all things. Secondly, those invisible things are clearly still a part of us. So, what we're going to be seeing are those things that we hide, the hidden hindrances, He actually begins to make reference to at the very beginning of this book. In fact, if you look with me in Zephaniah 1:2 where He says,

“I will completely remove all things
From the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.

“I will remove man and beast;
I will remove the birds of the sky
And the fish of the sea...”

There's a simple phrase right here. You might want to underline it if you haven't already.

“...And the ruins along with the wicked”

Once again, the word “ruins” there in the text is translated or should be translated *stumbling blocks*. Now one of the reasons why stumbling blocks are stumbling blocks is because you can't see them. So, the stumbling blocks that we've allowed to exist in our lives, and of course we know what and how God views stumbling blocks, in particular in Matthew 18:6, if you remember, it would be better that a millstone be hung around your neck than you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. So, those stumbling blocks don't look like to many people that there's a real issue, but it does cause tremendous problems and tremendous hurt. So, he uses the phrase,

“And the ruins along with the wicked;
And I will cut off man from the face of the earth,’ declares the LORD.”

Zephaniah 1:4. "So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will cut off the..."

And here's the other word that you'll want to underline:

"remnant"

Oftentimes, actually translated *residue*, that which is leftover. So, what we're going to be talking about obviously are those stumbling blocks that have been left and the remnants of idolatry that have been held onto because we know that this book was actually written during the time of king Josiah's reform. So, a lot of reforms have been happening, a lot of the external stuff has been dealt with. He's been trashing all the idols that are out there, but people are still holding on to these things at home, and the worship still continues in many of the corners of the city. So, this is what we're dealing with in this particular prophecy. Once again, lest you think that it's ok as long as we're having the big giant services and everybody comes to church, that God is good with that. This is one of the reasons why you have a book like Zephaniah because we so easily deceive ourselves and perceive that if everything external was being done appropriately, then you know, why do we have to change the internal?

So, if we look at this particular book, we begin to see the hidden hindrances at the very beginning of the text. When you look at Zephaniah 1:1-4, that's what you're fundamentally dealing with. He's beginning to give the reasons why He's saying everything has to go. By the time we come to the next few verses, you're dealing with hidden agendas, and you begin to see the deception that's involved in those hidden agendas and duplicitous ways of worshipping. More specifically, you have idols. You have things that you adore. You might come to church, but there are other things that you idolize more than God. So, you're sort of playing both sides against the middle. Of course, we know that doesn't work with any relationship, especially with God, and it would be strange and bizarre to think that He would be accepting of something like that. So, He begins to mention those things. In fact, it picks up and it overlays into Zephaniah 1:4. So, if you go back to verse 4, He talks about the "remnant of Baal". See what He says in the middle of verse 4 there?

Zephaniah 1:4. "And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests."

Once again, you're dealing with personalities. You're dealing with adoration, and then He goes into the domestic influences, worshipping on the housetops. See that? So, what you have fundamentally is that not only do you have an inappropriate adoration for other gods, but you have domestic influences that really encourage perhaps even family members to aspire other things other than God. Once again, the thought is "What's the big deal?" I knew this one family that were extremely religious, very involved in Christian activities and all kinds of things such as this and very much active in church, and even had a ministry of their own; but the one thing that was extremely taught over and over again within home was drama and acting and being on stage and performance is such a big deal and it actually caused a tremendous rift and confusion

to the kids. They were having a hard time ascertaining what this was about. Is my life about drama? Is it about performance or is it about following the Lord? They couldn't seem to bring the two together, which the two aren't together. Because following God is about being real, performing is about being fake. You're performing. You're not being real. So, what it caused was a lot of confusion within the family and a lot of hurt actually came out of that. So, obviously the point that I'm making is that you can't play both sides against the middle. You're going to have to serve God and He interjects that if you look within the passage with me,

Zephaniah 1:5. "And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven, And those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom..."

And then it goes on:

Zephaniah 1:6. "And those who have turned back from following the LORD, And those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him."

Which is interesting, because what begins to happen is once you begin to pursue other agendas and other things and you become deceptive in the way that you worship, and you play on both sides. When that begins to happen, then I can tell you who you're going to choose ultimately and you're not going to choose God. You're going to choose the other thing; the other things are going to come in and take precedence.

In Zephaniah 1:4-9, you're seeing that hidden agenda coming into play and then as you come into the next few verses, Zephaniah 1:10-13, you begin to see the hidden weaknesses, things that man is trusting in. This is the bizarre thing that He begins to demonstrate. If you look with me in Zephaniah 1:10, it reads this way,

"On that day," declares the LORD,
'There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate..."

Once again, the "Fish Gate" was the place where they did all their trading. One of the great indictments against Judah was they were leaving the gates open on the Sabbath day. In other words, it was just another business day; and God says, "You were supposed to see Me as holy, but you're not." Of course, we see that in America. You know, what's the difference? It's all about making money and if you can make more money by staying open longer, then that's a good thing, right? Not really.

"There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate,
A wail from the Second Quarter..."

Once again that's the second wall that was built and we're going to tie this to 2 Chronicles 34 where, if you remember, when the king was wanting to hear from a prophet and instead of going to Jeremiah or maybe Zephaniah, they go to Huldah. Once again, her name means weasel. Let me just say this too, and I don't want to pounce on her too much but Leviticus 11:29 says that the weasel is an unclean animal. So, things aren't looking good for somebody to be

called that. The point is that they were looking in the wrong places and seeking the wrong people for guidance and directions. Goes back to 2 Timothy 4, right? What does it say?

2 Timothy 4: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires"

Then you begin to see people going, "Well, I don't like what this person is saying. So, I'm going to go over here and find a person who agrees with the way that I live and the things that I want to pursue." So, they found Huldah, but unfortunately, Huldah had to prophesy whatever God said, it's sort of like Balaam and Balak. Remember that whole thing? They were trying to get him to prophecy, but he goes, "I can't. God won't let me." So, God begins to prophecy truth through her but what the passage is saying is that they were going in the wrong places. Now what's interesting is the Second Quarter, if you look at verse 10 where it makes mention that it is there at the Fish Gate and it is the place where a lot of business is done. What's interesting about that, if you back up in Zephaniah 1:8 and you look at His indictment against the princes,

Zephaniah 1:8. "Then it will come about on the day of the LORD'S sacrifice That I will punish the princes, the king's sons"

Watch the phrase here:

"And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments."

See that? So, what it's talking about is the princes were trying to imitate or emulate the world; and their thought was if we can imitate the world, the world will accept us and if the world accepts us, then we'll be safe. So, they actually put the clothing in the Second Quarter, if you look in 2 Chronicles 34, that's where Huldah is and it's her family that's kind of in charge of the clothing. So, quick-change artist type thing, but the but the point is that they're trying to emulate the world, and this is where they go to find advice. If you could just find advice from somebody that thinks like you then that's good advice, right?

"A wail from the Second Quarter,
And a loud crash from the hills."

The point of the text is the very places that you trusted in, the place of business, the place in which you dressed, in accordance with the world. You begin to trust in these things. It goes on and says in Zephaniah 1:11,

"Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar..."

Once again, a place of business and an interesting picture of doing business because the mortar is a picture of crushing the wheat at that particular place. So, what it's talking about is that this is going to be a sorrowful place because you put your trust in all the wrong things, and that is a hidden weakness when you think about it. In fact, it goes on and it says,

“For all the people of Canaan”

We know that Canaanites is another picture and synonym for merchants.

“For all the people of Canaan will be silenced;
All who weigh out silver will be cut off.”

So once again, what are we talking about? Obviously putting their hope in money.

Zephaniah 1:12. “It will come about at that time
That I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
And I will punish the men
Who are stagnant in spirit,”

Or more specifically, the thickening of the lees is what it’s talking about. Once again, they need stirring up. Otherwise, they’re going to get rotten and too late. They’re already rotten. So, the point is, is that if you look at the passage

“Who say in their hearts,
‘The LORD will not do good or evil!’”

“He’s not going to do anything, why are they saying that? Well, because nothing’s happened. They’ve been doing what they’ve been doing for a while now and nothing happened. It’s like Ecclesiastes says, if you’re slow at bringing stuff before the court, then the people who are doing the thievery and the criminal activity are going to go, “I guess it’s ok.” I mean, just start shutting down some of those things in some of the cities and see what happens. So, the point of the matter is that because nothing’s being done and because they’ve been literally getting away with murder. I mean, we can say that because you read Jeremiah 7, they’ve been killing people, they’ve been murdering their own people. They’ve been stealing from their own people. They’ve been getting away with it and their thought is nothing’s going to happen. It really is just the arrogance of man that begins to cause us to think that way. You would think that if you were shown some kind of mercy, then you would go, “Thank God lightning didn’t strike me today.” And you would want to do the right thing. No, no, no. It’s a license now. The license to do the wrong thing, and then it’s that fundamental principle, if you look with me in Isaiah 26, probably most of you have memorized this one. But once again, it’s good to turn to them because having some of these passages is just a good reminder. People oftentimes think if we’re just nice to everybody, then everybody will be nice back. Ok, that works for some people. It doesn’t work with everybody. So, Isaiah 26:10, if you drop on down, begins to reveal to us,

“Though the wicked is shown favor,
He does not learn righteousness;
He deals unjustly in the land of uprightness,
And does not perceive the majesty of the LORD.”

In other words, a wicked person, you get him off he goes, "I got off. I can do this again." That's the way he thinks.

So, the passage is really revealing that they become stagnant in spirit, they say in their heart, God's not going to do anything, I guess we can do whatever we want to do, and they begin to show a hardness of heart in this. You see this not only with the Judeans, but you see this with all the people and what begins to happen, of course, is that they just become arrogant, and they think they can get away with murder.

If I can give an example of just the mindset, Jeremiah 10, I like the way Jeremiah puts it. He's just so forthright in his declarations and the fact that man is obviously deceiving himself and He says basically, fundamentally, you can't trust anybody. That's in Jeremiah 9:4. You've got to be on guard, you can't trust anybody and that's the way things were.

Jeremiah 9:5. "Everyone deceives his neighbor
And does not speak the truth,"

Jeremiah 9:6. "Your dwelling is in the midst of deceit;
Through deceit they refuse to know Me," declares the LORD.

So, obviously things are not good. What's the status of their hearts? Well, if you look in Jeremiah 9:23-24, God is saying don't boast in anything of man.

"Thus says the LORD, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches;'"

If you're going to boast in anything, boast in the Lord, but of course they obviously were boasting in all kinds of other things. But if you look with me in Jeremiah 10:3, it begins to reveal that here you have customs of the world that have come in, and it says in verse 3 "the customs of the peoples are" ...what? "Delusion." So basically, you're dealing with delusional people.

In fact, if you look at Jeremiah 10:8, "But they are altogether stupid and foolish
In their discipline of delusion"

So, you have this delusional thing going on and let me just tell you where delusion comes from so you don't make the mistake and get delusional. I can tell you where it comes from, it comes from pride. Paul deals with that specifically in Romans 12, don't think more highly of yourself than you ought. This will bring instability. If we had time, I could sit down with you and trace almost every emotional deprivation to pride. I mean, whether it's obsessive compulsive or whether it's depression. I can go down the list. I could show you how they're related to pride, that pride is a source of being delusional. So, He begins to talk about that, and you realize that not only the Judeans, but if you look in Jeremiah 48, since we're right there, Jeremiah is a contemporary to Zephaniah. So, basically the same time. But if you look in Jeremiah chapter 48:11, he talks about Moab. Now remember, Moab was another kind of group of people, fairly

close and neighbors of Israel but the way he describes them in verse 11 sounds very much familiar.

Jeremiah 48:11. "Moab has been at ease since his youth;
He has also been undisturbed,"

On his lees. Once again, there's that interesting phrase that's being used.

"And he has not been emptied from vessel to vessel,"

In other words, to keep that problem from coming in as stagnant in spirit.

"Nor has he gone into exile.
Therefore he retains his flavor,
And his aroma has not changed."

In other words, the thought is, nothing's going to happen. So, when God says that, yeah, the only thing that's happening is you're starting to stink clearly and obviously in the nostrils of God and you'll see this with Babylon.

If you look with me in Isaiah 57. Just to show you that it's a pattern when you begin to pursue whatever you pursue and God seems to, and this is very important because this is one of the things we're going to be looking at tonight; it seems as if God's doing nothing because nothing's happening right now. So, the thought is, "I got away with it, nothing's going to happen. Everything's going to be ok." But that's the point of the passage. If you look at, Isaiah 57. You begin to see Babylon itself, that begins to describe itself as, "Well, no one's going to take me." And if you look in verse 11, even God's own people then begin to rebuke and say, "We've gotten away with it."

Isaiah 57:11. "Of whom were you worried and fearful
When you lied, and did not remember Me
Nor give Me a thought?
Was I not silent even for a long time
So you do not fear Me?"

And so, when God begins, silent, of course, people begin to think that, "I don't know, I guess He doesn't care. I guess it's not really a big issue." But it is a big issue.

Probably one of the most poignant passages of Scripture that deal with this is Psalm 50. God says to the wicked, "You don't have the right to take My words in your mouth; but you do it anyway." He begins to talk about in Psalm 50:17-20,

"For you hate discipline,
And you cast My words behind you

When you see a thief, you are pleased with him,
And you associate with adulterers.

You let your mouth loose in evil
And your tongue frames deceit.

You sit and speak against your brother;
You slander your own mother's son.

Psalm 50:21. "These things you have done and I kept silence;
You thought that I was just like you;
I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes."

"You thought I was agreeing with you. You thought I was saying. "Ok, everything's ok. Go ahead." If you want to look at another passage, don't look at a lot of them, but if you look in Psalm 10:3-4,

"For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire,
And the greedy man curses and spurns the LORD."

Why does he do that? He gets away with it. No one's going to mess with him.

"The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek Him.
All his thoughts are, 'There is no God.'"

Psalm 10:5-10. "His ways prosper at all times;
Your judgments are on high, out of his sight;
As for all his adversaries, he snorts at them.

He says to himself, 'I will not be moved;
Throughout all generations I will not be in adversity.'

His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression;
Under his tongue is mischief and wickedness.

He sits in the lurking places of the villages;
In the hiding places he kills the innocent;
His eyes stealthily watch for the unfortunate.

He lurks in a hiding place as a lion in his lair;
He lurks to catch the afflicted;
He catches the afflicted when he draws him into his net.

He crouches, he bows down,
And the unfortunate fall by his mighty ones."

If you look in verse 11,

“He says to himself, “God has forgotten;
He has hidden His face; He will never see it.””

He says to himself, “God doesn’t even know what’s going on.” He's hiding his face, “He's never going to see.” Yeah, that's not true.

So, what we see in these particular verses is the hidden weaknesses because you've trusted in your money, you've trusted in your business, you've trusted in maybe sources of subterfuge that you invented. Maybe you've built walls in the Second Quarter. There are all kinds of things that you've trusted in and you've you said to yourself, “Ok, so everything's ok. I mean, nothing's happened. We've lived this way for a long time.” So, you become stagnant in your spirit, you say in your heart nothing bad is going to happen.

Zephaniah 1:13. “Moreover, their wealth will become plunder
And their houses desolate;
Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit them,
And plant vineyards but not drink their wine.”

In other words, I'm going to take away even the ability for you to enjoy anything. Now once again, that's hidden from them, and this is the reason why the prophet is revealing these things because the prophet is revealing to them that their trust has been in the wrong stuff. I like the way that that it's put in the New Testament, when they call someone whitewashed walls. Well, what they mean by that is that the walls are really decrepit; but to make them look strong, they just whitewash them. If you lean on them, they're going to fall because they're all broken down. So, it's an interesting picture of looking good, but very unreliable. They're hidden weaknesses because you don't know that they're not going to work until they don't work. Then you find out they don't work, but hey, that's kind of too late. So, the hidden weaknesses are really revealed in Zephaniah 1:10-13.

Tonight, in Zephaniah 1:14-18 we're going to be seeing hidden dangers that they weren't expecting. He begins to describe those. Now, what's also interesting in this is the imminence of it. We use this particular word when we're talking about the rapture, it could happen anytime. They say, “But it's not going to happen anytime.” It's like in Peter, “Ah the Lord's coming is not going to happen. All things remain the same. Things are unchanged.” So, in the last days scoffers are going to come and they're going to go, “Yeah, that's not going to happen.” Of course, Peter goes, “Yeah, but you forgot things did change with Noah. So, God does change things.” Peter reminds us of that. In this passage he uses a particular word and wants to repeat it, the word “near”. We know that at this juncture we're probably about 22 years away from this happening, but that's pretty close. It's especially close because of the fact that it's not expected. And this is what's so bizarre, because you would think that you would see the signs. That you would see things happening.

I'm just going to give you a brief synopsis about what has been happening. Basically, during the time, if you go back a few kings, basically around the time of Ahaz and Saul, this great power is

coming up called Assyria. Now at that time, Assyria wasn't the greatest power, but he saw it as somebody that maybe could help him out because Syria was attacking him. He goes and he makes friends with Assyria, these foreigners, because he perceives that this could actually be a source of hope. Now, the Prophet said to him, "God says just turn to me. I'll help you out. Whatever you want to ask as high as the heavens, deep as Sheol, I'll give it to you." He goes, "No, no. I'll go to the world." So, he goes to Assyria and he actually is able to win the battle, but then Assyria comes back, and they say, "Yeah, but we want more money." So, they began to hound him. Well, what know ultimately happens is that Assyria attacks and takes in all of Israel. So, the very people you turned to for help. So, the Israelites, not only the Israelites but now Judah, will turn to Egypt because their thought is, "Oh, maybe Egypt will help us." And they'll go to Egypt for help. But the argument is going to be: No, Egypt is going to turn on you. So, don't trust them. In fact, the way they're described is a reed that's going to bend because they're known for their reeds. So, what ends up happening? Well, they end up trusting, then they end up fighting Egypt. They go back and forth and then Egypt turns out to be a real problem, especially when Babylon starts coming up. Now, what's interesting is when Hezekiah was king, (we're basically dealing with the grandfather of Josiah now) he had to deal with Assyria, and God took them out of the picture and there was another power coming up called Babylon; but at that particular juncture, they weren't like a superpower, and they weren't super aggressive. So, he calls them up or sends a letter or whatever. Then they send a letter to him, saying, "Can we be friends?" And he goes, "Oh, Babylon wants to be friends with me." So, he invites them to dinner, and he begins to show them all the treasures. Then the story ultimately ends up that Babylon turns out to be their enemy. Oh, my goodness, who would have known that, you know? The point is when pride's involved, nobody sees anything coming.

For instance, here we are, in America, and I'm not a prophet. So, I'm not prophesying here, but here we are in America, we'll play favorites with Russia sometimes, sometimes we'll pat China's back. So, we'll go to all these different nations and our thought is, "Well, maybe we can work a deal. Especially if there's a good guy in office at this particular time." And what we know is we're dealing with the volatility of man and at any time, this can turn on us. It's like being a snake charmer, "Hey, I got the snake, and he seems to be happy." Just don't go too close to him. But it's the world that we live in. But man, in his arrogance, doesn't see any of this. So, when Zephaniah is saying "near is the day," Josiah is going, "I think we got this. We're making deals. My grandfather made a deal with Babylon not too long ago. I think we're ok"

Here again, if you back up one book into Habakkuk, in the beginning, is a good description of Babylon coming.

Habakkuk 1:5. "Look among the nations! Observe!
Be astonished! Wonder!
Because I am doing something in your days—
You would not believe if you were told."

Now the point is that you're not expecting this. It's like China invading us or Japan bombing Hawaii. Who would have thought that? You know, "I thought Germany was our enemy" or something like that.

Habakkuk 1:6. "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,"

Why wouldn't you believe it? Because they weren't expecting that. See, man in his wisdom, he thinks he's got this all figured out. Yeah, you have no idea.

"That fierce and impetuous people"

What does that tell you? Unpredictable.

"Who march throughout the earth
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs."

Habakkuk 1:7. "They are dreaded and feared;
Their justice and authority originate with themselves."

You go, "Wait, that's against the law." They go, "Yeah, too bad."

Habakkuk 1:8. "Their horses are swifter than leopards
And keener than wolves in the evening.
Their horsemen come galloping,
Their horsemen come from afar;
They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour."

Habakkuk 1:9. "All of them come for violence.
Their horde of faces moves forward.
They collect captives like sand."

That's interesting. They're not coming for money, they just want to kill you. You know, there actually are some people that just like killing.

Habakkuk 1:10. "They mock at kings"

"Wait, I'm a king." they go, "Ok, we'll kill you too."

"And rulers are a laughing matter to them.
They laugh at every fortress
And heap up rubble to capture it."

Habakkuk 1:11. "Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on.
But they will be held guilty,
They whose strength is their god."

I mean, nothing's going to stand in their way. There's one description that's given it says, they're like a snake going through the grass. I go, "Ok, that that doesn't sound too loud." The

point is that it's kind of like a moving of the grass. You can hear the grass moving. Well, what they do is they bring in all these soldiers, and they have these axes, and they just level everything as they come, and they have so many of them that it doesn't sound like just one tree going down, it sounds like thousands of trees going down. You're having hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Can you imagine seeing something like this? Just watching the trees do this as they're coming in? Could you imagine something like that? And they're coming for you and it's not like you could get out in front of them and go, "halt," because the only thing that's going to happen is you're just going to get run over with the power of these. Well, that's the warning in verse 14, you thought you were comfortable, no problems. I mean, you've become literally stagnant in spirit. "Nothing's going to happen to me. God's not going to do anything." He goes, "It's near, right now."

Scripture talks about the last days and how surprising it will be to people. Here again, what a strange thought that in the last days the world would make these movies and they go, "Final days are here." So, why are you making a movie and why are you selling books if you thought that final days are here? Right? You mean you want to make money? Why? The final days are here. So, why get into all this? Scripture says,

Zephaniah 1:14. "Near is the great day of the LORD,
Near and coming very quickly;"

When it happens, it'll happen so fast you're not going to stop it. Now, we know what ultimately happens with king Zedekiah is not only is he taken, but his sons are slaughtered in front of his eyes and then they poke his eyes out. They let him see his sons get slaughtered and they just gouge his eyes out. So, it's the last thing he remembers. These are the kind of people that are coming. So, when it says, "near is the great day," It's almost here. Just take a moment and look with me in the Gospel of Luke. Luke 12. There are several pictures like this, but it's just a good reminder that people are so arrogant, "Well, nothing's going to happen." We could say something like this and so Jesus gives an interesting parable, if you remember, talking about this rich man. Luke 12 begins to talk about a guy that says, "Tell my family to give my inheritance to me." And Jesus basically says, beware of all kinds of greed and then He goes on and He says, "Let me tell you a parable."

Luke 12:16. And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive.

"And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'

"Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'"

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’

What does He say? “This very night.” Who could have figured that out? That it was going to be “this very night.” Keep your finger here as we’re going back there in just a minute; but I want you to go all the way back to Ecclesiastes 9. There’s a verse here and it’s good to remember certain verses, right? Because it just gives you perspective. You know when you were younger, and you thought you were going to live forever? I mean, you don’t say that, but you just think, “It’s so long away it’s just impossible for me to even imagine me ever thinking about dying.”

Ecclesiastes 9:12. “Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.”

Did you know that? We all know, especially, the way people drive nowadays. You don’t know what’s going to happen to you tomorrow. It’s unpredictable. Your life is unpredictable and even when you consider our human condition and how weak we are. If you prick your finger, you could have an infection and you’re out of there or some little bug that flies around and you can’t even see the bug and it hits you. Clearly our life is in His hands. If it wasn’t, there’s nothing you could do about it. My grandson had one of those fast Challengers and went off the road on a rainy day this past week and the car flipped over and totaled the car. The boy is still alive and wants to buy another one; but think about how fast everything can change instantly. That’s it. It’s an amazing thought.

You see that subject brought up again in Luke 17:26,

“And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:”

Now once again, this guy is building a boat and how long does that take? Well, I don’t know, if you believe that the amount of span is what’s being conveyed there within the text of Genesis, it took 120 years. So, wow, that’s a long time and you’re having this kind of suggestion, it just may rain.

“they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.”

In other words, everybody was doing everything that they always do, all the time. Nothing has changed. There was no repentance. If there was repentance, there would have been more than eight people in the boat. That’s that. There was no repentance. They were eating and drinking. They were marrying. They were giving a marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark and the flood came. Until the day. They weren’t changing. It was the same that happened in the days of Lot with Sodom and Gomorrah. They were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building. “Nothing’s going to happen.” I always thought, “Wow, you people are grossly sinning, and you know that God is not pleased with you.” You have to remember, the whole family that came off the ark were godly people.

So, all of the generations in Sodom and Gomorrah knew what was right and what was wrong. So here they are, sinning in such a gross way and just to give you a little geography here, their paradise had tar pits. I'm thinking, "Tar pits. Fire. Tar pits. Fire. Flammable. Maybe I don't want to do this, you know?" Didn't seem to make any difference. So, the point is that they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building but on the day that Lot went from Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Can you imagine how quickly that all caught fire? It will be just the same on the day the son of man is revealed. On that day the one who is on the housetop who has goods; don't pack anything. Get out of there.

One of the greatest verses, it's not a long verse, Luke 17:32, "Remember Lot's wife." I mean, all she did was turn around and she turns into salt. So, what is the passage saying? Well, it's clearly saying that you don't know the time, it is imminent.

As Zephaniah 1:14 will start off,

"Near is the great day of the LORD."

What's the next phrase?

"Near and coming very quickly."

Now once again, this is hidden. Otherwise, Zephaniah wouldn't have to say this but they're going around going, "Well, it's not going to happen today. It's not going to happen anytime soon." But the passage says,

"Listen, the day of the LORD!
In it the warrior cries out bitterly."

That's an interesting way of sharing the point that if you can hear the warrior cries, it's near.

"A day of wrath is that day,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of destruction and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloom,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,

A day of trumpet and battle cry
Against the fortified cities
And the high corner towers."

"I can hear it. I can hear these things." What is it against? Well, your fortified cities aren't going to help this. I mean, the mass of humanity is coming. The high towers that you have aren't high enough.

Zephaniah 1:17. "I will bring distress on men
So that they will walk like the blind,"

That picture is actually given, if you remember, in Isaiah 59. That's an interesting picture. If you've ever dealt with a death of a close person to you. You're walking around, it's like you're almost detached from your body. You know what I'm talking about? It's so surreal, nothing seems real, and you almost don't even know where you're going or what you're doing or who's around you, doesn't seem to matter. It's an interesting picture of great grief and mourning and distress.

"I will bring distress on men
So that they will walk like the blind,
Because they have sinned against the LORD;
And their blood will be poured out like dust,"

What a description. You know, the Psalmist says, oh Lord, you know that we're but dust. Why does he make mention of that? Because here's the point: nothing without God has any value. You take the breath of God out of your life, you're worth dust. You're worth dust. That's it. Once God is removed out of the picture, and let me just say this, and man regards you as such, the worth and the value of human dignity and people at large are reduced to nothing. This is why when you have these great wars, or you have people that have just pushed aside that which is godly and that which is right then humanity becomes cheap. Now you have things like human trafficking. You're going, "What? That's a person. Why? What are you thinking? That's a person." Well, there's no value of the person.

"And their blood will be poured out like dust,
And their flesh like dung."

Of course, literally repelled and repulsive to the people around them. Once again, what an interesting picture that is.

Zephaniah 1:18. "Neither their silver nor their gold
Will be able to deliver them
On the day of the LORD'S wrath;
And all the earth will be devoured
In the fire of His jealousy,
For He will make a complete end,
Indeed a terrifying one,
Of all the inhabitants of the earth."

It's a fundamental point. Scripture has been warning that all along. Let me give you an example.

Proverbs 11:4. "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,
But righteousness delivers from death."

You know, there's some things you can't buy your way out of. Here again, I can just see somebody going, "Don't worry. I've got a lot of money." And then the Chaldeans come, and they go, "We don't care about money. We just want you dead."

Proverbs 11:28. "He who trusts in his riches will fall,
But the righteous will flourish like the green leaf."

So, God's been warning all along, but still man goes, "No, I think I got this."

"Neither their silver nor their gold
Will be able to deliver them
On the day of the LORD'S wrath;
And all the earth will be devoured
In the fire of His jealousy,"

I just want to stop there for just a second because there's two phrases that I just want to focus on; "the day of the LORD'S wrath," and "the fire of His jealousy."

"I didn't know God was mad." That's one of those hidden things, right? One of the things that my kids always knew about me was if they did something wrong and then I didn't say anything, they knew that they were in trouble. But a lot of times people take it like, "Ok, God didn't say anything, so he's happy with us." If God's not saying anything, then you're in trouble. If God's not working in your life, if there's silence, it's deafening. It's very interesting when you look at Revelation right before the wrath of God, and the bowls are poured out, it says there's silence in heaven. Think about that. That's pretty interesting. Why is there silence? God's mad. You go, "Well, He's not supposed to be mad." What Scripture's talking about is that God is passionate about these things and I think it's one of the things that's hidden from a person. I mean, you take a person that's basically detached from the world, and they just don't get why anybody would be upset about a relationship that's broken. They just don't get it. "What's the problem? What's the problem?" But what we see is that there is a great passion, there's great depth of God's feelings, His emotions.

Ephesians 4:30. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

I remember when one of my professors first mentioned that particular verse because we were actually talking about that the Holy Spirit is a person. You know, lots of people say "it" or whatever but this particular professor was talking, and he says, "And one of the ways that you know he's a person is because you can't grieve an "it". You can only grieve a person." The Scripture says don't grieve the Holy Spirit and to think, I mean, we don't think in terms of God's deep emotions. All the way through Scripture, we see Him conveying that. Once again, because man is detached from the relationship, it's hard for him to think this way; but if you read Scripture, God is very passionate. One of the reasons why I believe He says that David was a

man after His own heart is because David's a very passionate guy and the Psalms are all very passionate and God goes, "That's like me." Why do you feel so deeply about things?

Let me give you a couple examples. Look with me at Hosea 11, and there are a number of passages in Hosea that I could show you, but as His concern begins to be for Ephraim, for Israel, he begins to cry out to them. How horrible it is to love somebody, and that person just rejects you. It's just such a horrible feeling. So, the passage reads in Hosea 11:7,

"So My people are bent on turning from Me.
Though they call them to the One on high,
None at all exalts Him."

Hosea 11:8. "How can I give you up, O Ephraim?"

This is what's so interesting about this passage, He knows that they've rejected Him. I can tell you my initial reaction is not "Come on, please?" It's "Ok. You're dead."

"How can I surrender you, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?"

How can I make you like some of these places that have already been destroyed (Admah)?

"How can I treat you like Zeboiim?"

Watch, this is God.

"My heart is turned over within Me,
All My compassions are kindled."

"I can't help it." Of course, the great statement within the passage, He goes, I know what you're thinking, but I'm God, I'm not a man, and I don't think like you. I mean, you begin to see the hurt that we're causing Him, and oftentimes there is no thought of that taking place.

Another passage is Ezekiel 16. I don't want to go into the whole chapter, but if you've ever read this chapter, you can't read it without thinking, wow, God really is very intimate and personal and caring. Just to describe to you what the chapter is about, here you have this baby that's squirming in the desert; just been born, hasn't even been wiped off, and it was just left abandoned, and God goes, "I picked you up. I washed you off and made you my kid. I gave you the best of everything and this is how you treat me?" It's a very interesting chapter. Then Isaiah 49, who hasn't read Isaiah 49:15-16 and you go, "Ok. Like a mother, a nursing mother. She's not going to forget her child, is she?" A nursing mother may forget her child, but God says, "I won't forget, I've inscribed you in the palms of my hands. I'm not going to forget you." And we go, wow, God is pretty passionate. That's what we're dealing with, the silence because nothing is

happening. They saw it as a license. They didn't see it as "this was God's grace," or "this was God's mercy." When you allow a person room to make bad decisions, you call them back but the more you give them, the more they hang themselves and how hurtful that is. This is an interesting picture of God's wrath burning, as the passage seems to make reference. One last passage dealing with that and is very familiar, found in James 4. James puts it in the sense of a relationship.

James 4:4. "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

He actually calls them adulteresses which is saying, "You love somebody else."

James 4:5. "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: 'He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us'?"

Once again, if you really love somebody, wouldn't you want somebody to really love you back, and to be jealous for that? I long for that. So, when we come to this passage, it begins to demonstrate just how on fire God. The chapter ends, as we're talking about, it's like a fire sale, everything has to go. The point is that it's like a husband that says to his wife, "I am faithful." and then, "But do you mind if I keep this love note from my girlfriend?" Get rid of the love note. See what I'm saying? That's the point. Everything has to go. It has to be a completely ended.

"Indeed a terrifying one."

Why? Because God jealously desires all of us. There are things in our life that we've allowed to stay in, and we say, "I'm going to trust in God. I'm going to trust in this too." God goes, "Why are you bringing that girl into the house? Why don't you just love me?" So, it's a great first chapter that talk about all of those hidden things that we begin to bring in. The last thing to me that's hidden is the hidden indignation of God and is a thought that never really crosses our mind. You're hurting God. "I didn't even think about that." Ok.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your word, that just reminds us of these things that we suppress and allow to come into our lives that just are devastating. Most of all, hurtful to You. God forgive us. In Jesus' name.