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Zephaniah

Chapter 2 – Hidden Humility

The passage that we're looking at and not ironically so, but divinely, in Zephaniah 2:1-3 is dealing with humility. The point of the passage is that the wrath of God is coming. What has been demonstrated to us at the beginning of Zephaniah 1 is that we all have our agendas, we all pursue our lifestyles. Oftentimes, without giving it a thought how it's going to affect anything or those around us. In our pursuits, we sometimes unwittingly, and sometimes even purposely hurt people, and carnage happens. Hurt happens. It talks about that in the first chapter of Zephaniah; and the things that we oftentimes have hidden are the things that are most the most grievous, the most hurtful towards the Lord. As we read that first chapter, you begin to realize that our feelings towards God is what matters the most, and how the arrogance of our own pursuits has pushed Him out; but God does look at the heart. God takes the heart very seriously. So, even though externally we might be seemingly doing all the right things, God still is examining our hearts. The bottom line in all of this is that your heart and your relationship with God is what defines an eternity. It's so strange to me how people are oftentimes cavalier about that. They don't take seriously the relationship between them and the Lord. We set up things in our life to be secure, to make us feel safe. Our perception is that maybe even our money could bail us out of certain situations. As this first chapter ends, he goes, there's not enough money in the world that can bail you out. There are things that God brings in our life to humble us. That helps us realize that. There are things that come into our lives that just shake our world. You start looking around, and you go, "Well, everything I trusted in up to this point couldn't do anything, can't save me." Then you realize how impotent all those things are. This is what leads us into the second chapter.

It's an interesting way in which he starts off the second chapter, as he seems to be gathering up the people. In fact, the statement at the very beginning is "gather" or gather up you people. This word that is used in the gathering up is only used for people in this text. In all the other places it is used to refer to gathering up wood to burn. The passage and the word itself literally mean a gathering up of dry sticks. In fact, if you come to 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.”

See the text, “the fire of His jealousy”? So, when He talks about gathering up of the dry sticks, more specifically gathering His people, He's revealing their vulnerability. Our perception is, and the world has helped us in this lie, is that we're safe. Psalm 49 says, our thoughts are we're going to live forever, but we know that's not true; and we know that as the psalmist makes it so clear, we are but dust. We have no control, but it's amazing how arrogant we can be. So, what Zephaniah reveals to me is though we have these hidden sins, and oftentimes they are rooted in the fact that we're not loving God the way that we should; in those hidden sins, there is a root called arrogance. It's that pride that has caused all the problems. It's the pride that's going to be dealt with, and it's the pride that God is dealing with. When God turns to His people and He says, “Ok, I'm going to gather you up like sticks,” He's showing them how vulnerable they are and how easily the fire is going to be lit. He turns to them in the midst of this, and He says, but there is a way out.

Zephaniah 2:3. “Seek the LORD,
All you humble of the earth
Who have carried out His ordinances;
Seek righteousness, seek humility.
Perhaps you will be hidden
In the day of the LORD'S anger.”

Now we would perceive that if they're humble, that everything's ok, but the wording that is used in the passage is dealing with somebody that has been pushed down. Sad to say, we don't humble ourselves.

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5, and James will tell us in James 4, that we need to humble ourselves before the Lord. James will tell us that “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Therefore, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. 1 Peter will literally use those same words, “humble yourself”. I'm reflecting on my own life, and that's what I want you to do tonight. I don't want you to think about anybody else but us. The bottom line is it's really hard for me to humble myself. It's not a natural pursuit. Have you found it just doesn't come naturally? Ok today, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to really pursue humility. The phrase in the passage is dealing with not that they humbled themselves, but that they were acted upon and made humbled. Actually, the phrase oftentimes used for this particular word is “browbeaten,” but it can refer to being oppressed. It can refer to in some way, somebody abusing you; but the point of the passage is that something has been brought into your life to put your face to the ground. You would have never wished for it, you never would have made it happen, but there you are, licking dust. In our minds, we would think, “That's the worst thing that ever happened to me. That's the absolute worst thing that ever happened to me.” But as we've all read, the book of James says that's the best thing that could ever happen to you. It's those trials, the hurts and the pains; and as you read through the book of James, you realize

that these people have been abused and they've been pushed down, and they've been oppressed, and you go, "How could that happen? Why would God let that happen?" The point of the passage is you're the lucky ones because if you've lived long enough to be humbled, God loves you because you realize that that's the only way to be saved. "God's opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

There's a number of passages that deal with this whole concept of humbling, but of course one of them is found in Proverbs 15, if you'll look there with me.

Proverbs 15:33. "The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom,
And before honor comes humility."

Here again, what's interesting is the word that's used in this text is the same one that's used in Zephaniah; which is telling us that somebody's been pushed down. The passage is letting us know once again that we don't willingly push ourselves down, but the difficulties that then come into our life are really the gifts of God that will bring us to a point of thinking sane; because up to that point we actually begin to think in an insane way; that we control everything. We think that we're somebody. In thinking that way, we're incorrigible, we don't listen to what anybody tells us. In fact, we just hate correction. I can tell you when you're flat on your face, you can't go any further down. It really is the greatest opportunity in your life to go, "You know what, I'm going to stop the whole arrogant thing. I'm going to stop trying to save face because everybody's worried about how things look." Stop. Just examine your life and just ask yourself one simple question: Am I humbling myself under the mighty hand of God? It's the only question you really need to ask; because that's really the only thing that matters. God's not going to ask you how many wonderful things you did, because you're not to do anything wonderful apart from Him.

Proverbs 15:25. "The LORD will tear down the house of the proud,
But He will establish the boundary of the widow."

That's a warning. It reveals to us that pride is going to mess our lives up.

Proverbs 15:10. "Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way;
He who hates reproof will die."

Well, who is it that hates correction? Who is it that hates reproof? The proud.

Proverbs 15:12. "A scoffer does not love one who reproves him,
He will not go to the wise."

So unfortunate. In Proverbs 16, he follows the theme in some way.

Proverbs 16:5. "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD;
Assuredly, he will not be unpunished."

I mean, we kind of think of pride as a take it or leave it type thing, but it “is an abomination to the Lord.” There are things that come into our life that are there to humble us. To resist that humbling just brings more pain and sorrow and hurt. Every time something happens in my life, I know that that's the Lord humbling me. I mean, the Lord is humbling me now through this instance. This is a time for us to examine ourselves, not everybody else and other people. Just us. Ask yourself one simple question: Have I humbled myself under the mighty hand of God?

Proverbs 16:18. “Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before stumbling.”

Proverbs 16:25. “There is a way which seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death.”

You can think that you're right, but it could be the wrong way. It's not a time to be perverse in our speech, or to separate with our mouths.

Proverbs 16:28. “A perverse man spreads strife,
And a slanderer separates intimate friends.”

The passage is very clear in all of those things.

When you look at Zephaniah, he goes, “Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth.” (Zephaniah 2:3) Those oppressive, hurtful times in your life is God giving you another moment to cry out to Him. “Seek the LORD.” He emphasizes within the passage that you need to desire the Lord, as well as the pursuit of Him. I can tell you, when you have humbling things come in your life, you realize, He's the only one that can help me. All those other things that I turned to before are not going to help. He'll listen to me.

“A broken and contrite spirit,” Scripture says, “He will not despise.”

The best way I can put this is all you have been abused, oppressed, pushed to the ground; all you who have desired to do what He wants you to do, that's the ordinances. Once again, I think many times, we say to ourselves, I just want to do what the Lord wants me to do; but the fact of the matter is that we have not humbled ourselves. We busy ourselves with a lot of interesting things to do and we try to make ourselves look really good; but what does it matter what people think of us? Why are we worried about that? The only concern that we should have is: Am I right with God?

So, if you really want to do what God wants you to do, then what does he say in Zephaniah 2:3? “Seek righteousness, seek humility.” Now, at the beginning of the text, you've been pushed down, but now you get to seek it. I found that it's a daily resolve because people are all about complementing this person and that person, how wonderful they are. We're not wonderful. I mean, no good thing dwells in me; but you have to keep taking yourself back there because once you and I start walking in that whole realm of, “I'm a pretty good person,” then there starts the comparison thing. Then before long, there's the whole condemnation and you're

criticizing everybody else. Our faith is not about that. It doesn't mean that we don't set standards, but it does mean that we hope and desire the person to do the right thing. We know that by them humbling themselves before the Lord and doing the right thing, then things will be better. You and I have to keep examining ourselves and keep coming back to "Lord, I realize if it weren't for You, I'd have no hope." We can go back to the day of our salvation, what even makes me want to do the right thing? Do you think that I'm that nice of a person that I just naturally want to do the right thing? There's nothing that could make me really want to do the right thing, except the Spirit of God. So, it would have to be all of Him, right? How could we take credit for any of that? So, the way he puts it is "seek righteousness." I don't want you to take that for granted, seek the right thing, but righteousness, *ṣedeq*, makes reference not only to doing the right thing according to God's standards, not ours, but it also refers to grace. So, you'll oftentimes see in the Old Testament in particular, righteousness actually being synonymous with compassion and mercy. It's an interesting combination, isn't it? So, that as we were looking at proverbs 16, if I could just show you where it comes together, and we'll clarify this.

Proverbs 16:5. "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished."

Proverbs 16:6. "By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil."

If you take "lovingkindness" and "truth" and put them together, you have the word "righteousness." In the Old Testament, if you're just talking about justice, he would use another word; but we're dealing with that which takes in both doing the right thing and an honorable, compassionate, and chivalrous mindset.

"By loving kindness and truth iniquity is atoned for." In other words, when you and I begin to pursue the right thing, and we do it in such a way that is compassionate and caring towards somebody else, God begins to release or to pull back His hand that had been upon us. He's longing for us to be merciful; He's longing for us to be compassionate. In our arrogance we're just so hurtful and hateful towards people and He says, if you start doing the right thing and start caring for people and start loving people the way you should, don't compromise right, but never let go of compassion and mercy. I'm going to rescue you. It will help atone for what you've done. Now watch what He says, and by the fear of the LORD, I can keep you away from problems.

That's a great passage, isn't it? "Seek righteousness, seek humility." We all oftentimes think of that passage in Micah that makes reference to the fact that you and I should be pursuing what God wants. What is it that God requires of you, O man? Yeah, but see, I don't even have to say it.

All the way through this particular book, if you look with me in Zephaniah 2:4-7, he'll begin to talk about the Philistines. You know what their fundamental problem is? Obviously, it is the arrogance of that nation.

If you look at Zephaniah 2:8-11, he begins to talk about the nation of Moab and Ammon. He says at the end of Zephaniah 2:8, the problem is they become arrogant.

Zephaniah 2:10. "This they will have in return for their pride, because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the LORD of hosts."

So, then he warns Jerusalem because Jerusalem is taking on the mindset of the world.

Zephaniah 2:15. "This is the exultant city
Which dwells securely,
Who says in her heart,
'I am, and there is no one besides me.'
How she has become a desolation,
A resting place for beasts!
Everyone who passes by her will hiss
And wave his hand in contempt."

The passage is talking about the arrogance of the city in which God is going to be dealing with the tyrannical city and that's why it goes into Zephaniah 3:1,

"Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,
The tyrannical city!"

It's the arrogance of the heart that He's dealing with, in particular in Zephaniah. When you read Zephaniah 1:2, you realize that everything has to go. What we're talking about is everything has to go, that's of pride and arrogance.

Once again, I'm encouraging you to reflect on your own life, but it's always surprised me how much pride I have in my life in hidden ways; because you think you've got it whipped, and then God reveals no, you're pretty arrogant on this end.

Isaiah 2 would concur with Zephaniah, in which he would basically and fundamentally say everything has to go; but the everything that has to go is the everything that brings pride and arrogance in our lives. So, as he begins to list all the things that bring pride, he'll begin to say, you have gold and silver (Isaiah 2:7) and you have these idols, the work of your hands (Isaiah 2:8). Of course, man, boasts in what he produces.

Isaiah 2:9. "So the common man has been humbled
And the man of importance has been abased,
But do not forgive them."

"Do not forgive them," because they have not humbled themselves.

Isaiah 2:11. "The proud look of man will be abased
And the loftiness of man will be humbled,
And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day."

Isaiah 2:12. "For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning
Against everyone who is proud and lofty
And against everyone who is lifted up,
That he may be abased."

Isaiah 2:13. "And it will be against all the cedars of Lebanon that are lofty and lifted up,
Against all the oaks of Bashan,"

Isaiah 2:14. "Against all the lofty mountains,
Against all the hills that are lifted up,"

Isaiah 2:15. "Against every high tower,
Against every fortified wall,"

Isaiah 2:16. "Against all the ships of Tarshish
And against all the beautiful craft."

I feel so bad for the people in the submarine, don't you? It's amazing what man will try to accomplish so that he can say he accomplished something. You build a ship, you say it'll never sink. I mean, you literally shake your fists and say it's not going to sink. Nothing can make this ship sink.

All the ships of Tarshish will be humbled.

Isaiah 2:17. "The pride of man will be humbled
And the loftiness of men will be abased;
And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day,"

This isn't God just being arrogant. This is truth. Man thinks he creates things. The only thing he does is make more pollution. That's the only thing you can do. It doesn't make the earth a better place. I've always thought it was funny, the environmentalists, we're going to save the world. You destroyed the world. You can't save something you're destroying. It seems like the more we try to save it, the more we destroy it. Only God can create. Only God preserves. Only God brings life, if you just admit this. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't try to be responsible, and please don't be trashy. It's not us and all the way through, you begin to realize that it's the arrogance of man that brings about great destruction; but it's the grace of God that uses that destruction to humble us. God begins to work in your life. I can go to certain times in my life in which God just brought me to my knees and thank God that I cried to Him at those times.

I Oftentimes think of Revelation, where you're having these things come down from the heaven, 100 pounds and people are cursing God; and I'm going, this is your opportunity to get

right with God, and yet you're cursing God. It just shows the pride and arrogance of man. Difficult times in our life are for the purpose of saving. God is saving me, He's saving you, and He's saving all that are going through those difficult times. The difficult times are not the worst times. In fact, the worst thing that could happen is that we didn't have the difficult times; because what you see in Zephaniah 1:12 is that when everything is ok, you become stagnant in spirit. The perception is that "I don't need anything," "I don't need to change," and then you breathe your last and you find out "Wow, was I wrong," but then it's too late, right? It's the grace of God that brings these things in our lives. I hurt every time somebody in the Body hurts, and I hurt when people are going through pain and suffering and it's never something that we would ever wish on anybody; but I know God is using it to humble me, to humble you, to save. God is saving in humility.

Remember Matthew 18 says it so clearly, unless you come as a child, unless you humble yourself, you cannot see the kingdom of heaven. You will not see it. There's a tremendous aspect of that humbling and we don't like to admit that we have this pride issue. I mean, what's so bizarre about this particular book is nobody really sees it; because Judah is going through all the motions of church and everything. So, nobody even looks like they're having a problem with pride, but God sees the heart. It's the heart that's going to either be saved or not. He calls upon them, there is the great day of the Lord. You have no idea how close the wrath is. I think one of the comforting things that I've had during these past months with my father is to continue to hear him say, "I'm ready to go home." He looks forward to going home. You think of people with the great fear that they have of death, but we know to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord and He's going to clothe us with a new body. "So, shall we ever be with the Lord." How wonderful is that? If we'll humble ourselves, and if God's people will humble themselves and pray, if we'll seek His face during these times. A difficult time is not a time for anybody to brag about anything, boast about anything, or condemn anybody about anything. It's a time of humbling in all of our lives and God is doing the work.

Ecclesiastes 7:1. "A good name is better than a good ointment,
And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth."

Ecclesiastes 7:2. "It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than to go to a house of feasting,
Because that is the end of every man,
And the living takes it to heart."

Ecclesiastes 7:3. "Sorrow is better than laughter,
For when a face is sad a heart may be happy."

Ecclesiastes 7:4. "The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning,
While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure."

God has given us a time to reflect, to think about things that are valuable, to think about things that matter, to pray for one another. I think of Daniel and how he came for his nation and just

said, "we have sinned. Lord, you've got to forgive us." It's in that, that we just begin to see the Lord work. The greatest thing that you could ever do for your children is to teach them humility. And that's sometimes hard to do; but you sometimes look at your kids and say, "You need to go apologize to that person." They'll say, "Oh, you don't know how embarrassing it is." "I'm sorry it's embarrassing, but you need to do that." Strangely enough, you're saving that soul. We need to teach our children how to minister to other people. How to stop thinking about themselves, but how to help somebody else. "Yeah, but it's taking me away from my pursuits." Good, because when you pursue your ways, you become arrogant and proud, tyrannical towards people. So, good because you're humbling yourself, because the goal of our instruction is love. We understand that love does not seek its own. So, what you're teaching the child is to not seek your own, but to hold others in higher esteem than yourself. When you give people everything they want, when they want it, you just create monsters. When you allow them to do things that you know are hurtful to other people, when you're more concerned about helping them save face than you are about helping them save lives, then destruction comes. God is humbling us. It's the time that we come in prayer.