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Zephaniah - Chapter 3

We're back in the book of Zephaniah, and I apologize for us bouncing back and forth, but I sure appreciate Joshua and the studies that he's done. It was encouraging to me just to listen to him last week and to just hear those wonderful truths from his words. We come to Zephaniah 3, and it's now an indictment against God's own people. It's where all of this has been leading from the very start. At the very beginning, you begin to realize that there are things in the world, well, quite frankly, everything in the world seems to draw us away from God. So, as we mentioned at the very beginning in the first chapter, there really has to be a "fire sale." Everything has to go, because if anything is left, we would either worship it or love it more than God. It is a wonderful picture of what God requires when we come to Him. Ours is the only faith that you actually win by surrendering; but it is in the surrendering all things as we even sing the song, "*all to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give.*" I remember one guy said it doesn't say, "I surrender 99.9 tenths, I freely give." It's "I surrender all," and it is the necessity in our lives to just get rid of those things because as Scripture says, the sins of this world so easily beset us. What we begin to understand, one of the points of the book of Zephaniah, is just because outwardly we seem to be towing the mark, perhaps by many people perceived as godly people, doesn't mean we are.

This book of Zephaniah begins to reveal things that have been left, in particular, the tribe of Judah. As Scripture conveys to us in the book of Jeremiah, they've actually been more treacherous than the northern tribes of Israel in that they've been saying that they love God, but in truth, not. It had, has become a treachery of deception, and God says, "It would be better if you just admit that you don't love Me, but now you say you love Me and you love other things." And how treacherous that is? So, as we come to Zephaniah 2, we begin to see the influences that come upon us. What's interesting in particular about Zephaniah 2, is He begins to list certain groupings; and He groups them in this way:

First, the Philistines, then the Moabites, Ammonites, then Egypt and Assyria, or more specifically, the city of Assyria, which was the capital at that particular time, Nineveh.

What He shows us within the passage in Chapter 2 is that these are all influences on His people; and what we're going to see is that these influences have infiltrated the hearts of His people. The world rubs off on you, and that really is the fundamental point. One of the things we were talking about before the service is that you take a person out of church, and before long, they begin to think like the world. They don't even know why they're thinking that way. In fact, they're thinking that they're right on course. Then they go back to church, and they go, "Whoa, am I off base." So, it shows just how easily we go off that path. "All we like sheep...have gone astray." (Isaiah 53:6) Ok, so that says, "All we like sheep have gone astray." So, all of us go our

own way, and the world has a way of just moving us; because what you're dealing with is this strong current. I mean, we are few drops in this massive current of the earth and if you've ever been caught in a strong current, you're going wherever the current goes. So, I think that's one of the reasons why Matthew talks about the way is broad and many there are that go the road of destruction. What you're on is the path of destruction, and when the Gospel, I.e., the seed, is thrown on the side of the road, you begin to realize that it's trampled by the world. The world hardens you to the truth. You're not receptive, but praise God for the tilling that moves that old soil and softens us in some way.

The Philistines are an interesting picture, and without going in particular with the passage, if you look in Zephaniah 2:4, it starts off with Gaza. It then talks about Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, these are all fundamentally, the capitals or large cities of the Philistines. Within the passage, it says at the end of Zephaniah 2:5,

“The word of the LORD is against you,
O Canaan, land of the Philistines;”

The passage is really dealing with the Philistines in this particular text. What we understand is that the characteristics of the Philistines are very aggressive. They're very aggressive people. Philistines in and of themselves make reference to a people that, well, probably the best way to describe it is they uproot other people. So, they actually list them as being part of the Cherethites in verse 5 as well, which we understand is kind of from the region of Crete. So, if you can kind of picture pirates, you would have a pretty good picture of the Philistines and then they're invaders. If you go all the way back to Genesis, it seems as if they actually come out of Egypt, which is pretty interesting; but you have these large aggressive people, and their thought is we're going to uproot everybody and take whatever we want to. So, I actually call it presumptuously invasive because, “Why are you taking my land?” “Because we want to.” And that would basically be the way the Philistines go, and they're a very hostile kind of people. Does this rub off on us? Yes, I see this all the time obviously, in the day and age that we live in, a presumptuous, invasive lifestyle. People don't understand why they can't have whatever they want. They begin to go into other people's property or take it. “It's mine.” What are you talking about? And people are becoming extremely aggressive and hostile; but the point is that these nations were rubbing off on Israel, or more specifically in Judah. Then you look at the Moabites and the Ammonites, and I'd probably put them in the category of family because obviously, from Lot and from that particular region. I don't know if it surprises you or not, but sometimes family can be arrogant and scornful, and revilers. That was one of the things that really marked these people, as it begins to describe them. In fact, if you look in verse 8, how does it start off with Moab?

“I have heard the taunting of Moab...”

What Scripture specifically deals with at the beginning of Psalm 1 is that you don't want to sit with these people, you don't want to sit with scoffers. These are the kind of people that are very destructive to be around.

Here again, we live in a day and age where people just get on a computer and say whatever they want to say, and purposely try to twist and distort truth. Oftentimes, people come up to me, "Did you hear this? Do you hear what this person will say?" But I said, "I don't even listen. I don't even go on. I'm going to let God take care of him." Try to focus on doing what is right. But arrogant, scornful revilers, the Moabites and the Ammonites, and you see that.

In fact, it says in verse 8,

"I have heard the taunting of Moab
And the revilings of the sons of Ammon,
With which they have taunted My people
And become arrogant against their territory."

It's clearly giving you the characteristics of these. Then as you go to Egypt and Assyria, He's bunched these two together, which is interesting from the South, Egypt, and from the North, Assyria. But both of them have this sense of boastful pride over their accomplishments, and I'm sure the Egyptians, "Do you see the pyramids, do you see the things that we've made?" And how great of course, Assyria with Nineveh, one of the greatest cities that has existed. So, they become boastful and there's this sense of superiority.

The final characteristic that's really mentioned within the passages is this false sense of security, if you look at the passage it reads this way, as it talks about "the exultant city." It's pretty interesting because it really is tying in the Ethiopians, verse 12, and verse 13 the Assyrians. But you come into verse 15,

"This is the exultant city
Which dwells securely,
Who says in her heart,
'I am, and there is no one besides me.'"

"Presumptuously" is just jumping into things and doing whatever you want to do, and of course, there is this sense of, "I can do whatever I want to do because I'm in charge." So, what you're seeing if you tie all this together, I mean clearly, it's the world that rubs off on us. One of the reasons why Scripture says this is a hateful place to live in. The point isn't simply that, though.

We now go into Zephaniah 3, and the main point of the book is that the greatest tyranny is from God's people because they have allowed this to come into their lives, and they've become like the world. You know, it's one thing when some stranger acts a certain way and you realize, ok, you know, it's just the way he is. But now your family starts acting that way, and start doing these kind of things against you, that hurts. So, the text begins to talk about these hidden things

that are now being revealed. God is conveying to them, "I know what's happened. I'm going to deal with them. I'm going to get them out of the way, but the fact of the matter is it's rubbed off on you." You see that in particular in Chapter 3 as it starts off,

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

Now, we know at this juncture that he's not talking about the exalted city in Zephaniah 2:15. What he's talking about in this particular text is Jerusalem, that has taken on the heirs of the world; and because of that they've become treacherous towards God. The interesting definition of that word, "tyrannical" within the text, "*yānâ*," is dealing with a violence. It's treating someone violently. What is it that is violent towards other people? Well, we're actually going to see what it is, defined in a greater way, but the emphasis is that once again, God's people have taken on the characteristics of the world and have rejected the only One who loves them. Now, that becomes tyrannical. It becomes treacherous and here again, like Jeremiah said, Judah becomes more treacherous than Israel in this because everything's become deceitful. That's part of the tyranny. In fact, if you look in verse 2, it says,

"She heeded no voice,
She accepted no instruction."

Once again, one of the reasons why we know he's talking about Jerusalem at this particular juncture is because he's talking about instruction. He wasn't going around instructing the other nations.

"She heeded no voice,
She accepted no instruction.
She did not trust in the LORD,
She did not draw near to her God."

The other nations weren't drawing near. I mean, they have an excuse, they worship another god.

(Zephaniah 3:3) "Her princes within her are roaring lions,
Her judges are wolves at evening..."

Obviously, they're taking advantage, exploiting, using, and devouring people.

"They leave nothing for the morning."

(Zephaniah 3:4) Her prophets are reckless," Watch the phrase. Here it is:

"Treacherous men"

You're dealing with a heart that is doing harm willingly to somebody else. I know that the world likes to accuse Christians of being intolerant. I just recently heard of our governor dealing with a

particular judge that was letting close to 50% of the people that were doing horrific crimes off scot-free, and the world would applaud something like that; but we would not. God sees this kind of treachery as something not to be overlooked. "Oh, he'll get better" or "she'll get better later on down the road." Yeah, well, look at the carnage.

So, as it comes in the passage, you begin to see God going, "You've taken on the characteristics of the nations, and this has made you actually more treacherous than the nations." There's a passage in Proverbs 22, if I can just give you some text that describes some of these, the words of treachery and how the Lord perceives it. It is interesting that in Proverbs 22:10 it starts off with dealing with the scoffer, which here again the scoffer is the one who scorns and makes fun of, and we live in a world that that does this, the slanderers, if I can put it this way. The reason why Satan is called the slanderer, right? The perception is that you have somebody that's a slanderer, "Well, let's work with them. Let's give them some counseling, or maybe some pills." But (Proverbs 22:10) "Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out..."

What does Scripture tell you to do with the scoffer? Get them out. It doesn't say "try to rehabilitate them." I think it's pretty interesting. It says get them out.

"Even strife and dishonor will cease," when you get this guy out of here.

This insolent pride, Proverbs 21:24 talks about it. It's an act of insolent pride and really it causes the person to be incorrigible, a scoffer. In fact, Scripture says, not only according to Psalm 11, don't sit with the scoffer, but It says in Proverbs 9:7, If you try to correct this guy then he'll find ways to dishonor you; which is pretty interesting. So, I'm just going to sit down and try to...." Oh, yeah. Ok, yeah, that's not going to work out too well. In fact, there really only seems to be one way to deal with the scoffer, and that's to get them out or to have great oppression which God handles.

If you look in Isaiah 28, it will give you an example of that. It's good to know that we don't have to be the correctors, but we don't to put up with it either. I'm not going to take somebody out and stone them, but I'm not going to let them stay in. If you look at Isaiah 28:22, God is virtually saying,

"And now do not carry on as scoffers..." Look at the way it's worded here in the passage, "Or your fetters will be made stronger."

You begin to realize that, "Ok, God's going to tighten His grip." That's the only way you can deal with these people because you know they're just going to make fun until they're hurting. That's unfortunate, but there are actual rebellious people that, as Isaiah 26 says, ok, you do something nice, they count that as a license to do more wrong. So, taking the stand is something that you want to do in particular, and just note with me in Isaiah 29:19 here, God says that the day is coming when God is going to make things right, obviously, within the passage.

"The afflicted also will increase their gladness in the LORD,
And the needy of mankind will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."

(Isaiah 29:20) For the ruthless will come to an end..."

Watch what it says,

"...and the scorner will be finished,
Indeed all who are intent on doing evil will be cut off;"

I have oftentimes thought about this particular phrase,

"Who cause a person to be indicted by a word."

You know, those sharp lawyers, actually I was talking to Connie about this today, that sidetrack by arguing semantics, you know? So, they're not dealing with justice or truth or righteousness of the issue. They just go, "What did you mean by that word?" Ok, so, and before long they lose the argument because maybe they are sharper at the words than other people. But the problem is that they've offended God and acted violently towards God's people, and God says it's not going to happen. It's not going to continue to go on.

So, Isaiah 33:1 says,

"Woe to you, O destroyer,
While you were not destroyed..."

That's interesting. His point is that, "I gave you enough rope to hang yourself," but it's also saying that God had a purpose in the destroyer. So, He was using it and we'll talk about that as we go.

"And he who is treacherous, while others did not deal treacherously with him..."

I think one of the one of the horrible things and one of the things that makes treachery, treachery is that a person does something horrible to somebody else and the other party was innocent. They didn't do anything. I mean, you can understand somebody protecting themselves. Well, this person didn't do anything, and then in the middle of that, they just took advantage of them. They treated them horribly or left them or whatever. There's a plethora of horrible things you could do to a person, and they're just sitting there, "What did I do?" And they didn't do anything. They were innocent parties, and that's what makes it treachery. It's pretty interesting and you see this, and God says, the day is coming when you're finished, and if you look in Isaiah 33:1,

"As soon as you finish..." "*Tāmam*," referring to the fact that you're completing the tasks that I've allowed you to do.

I'm so thankful that God is sovereign over this, and that God is even using the destructive patterns of evil people. But God says, "When you're done, I'll be done with you, and that's going to be the end of you." A very interesting passage.

You see this in particular if you look in Isaiah 10, and we've read this a number of times, but it is the chapter that begins to describe God using Assyria to do His bidding and to be a rod. The point is that His own people were doing terrible things, and God goes, "Ok, so I've got to bring a rod against you." Once again, it's kind of God's way of showing that the only way you can deal with the scorners, the only way you can deal with the person who's taking on these characteristics is there has to be divine force that comes against them. So, if you look in Isaiah 9:11, it says,

"Therefore the LORD raises against them adversaries from Rezin
And spurs their enemies on,

(Isaiah 9:12) The Arameans on the east and the Philistines on the west..."

In other words, where did all these enemies come from? God goes, "I created them."

(Isaiah 9:13) "Yet the people do not turn back to Him who struck them,
Nor do they seek the LORD of hosts."

Here again, an interesting picture of incorrigible behavior.

It goes on in Isaiah 10, and this is the indictment against God's own people,

(Isaiah 10:1) "Woe to those who enact evil statutes
And to those who constantly record unjust decisions

(Isaiah 10:2) So as to deprive the needy of justice
And rob the poor of My people of their rights,
So that widows may be their spoil
And that they may plunder the orphans.

(Isaiah 10:3) "Now what will you do in the day of punishment,
And in the devastation which will come from afar?
To whom will you flee for help?"

"There's no place you can go. I'm coming after you."

It says in verse 5 that He's going to call Assyria to be the rod, but then He turns to Assyria, and He goes, "Woe to you for doing it." And you see that theme going on. Of course, Assyria boasts in their power, and He goes, "You shouldn't be doing that." And then if you come to Isaiah 10:20,

"Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel."

(Isaiah 10:21) "A remnant will return," He's going to repeat this, "the remnant of Jacob."

Why do you think he emphasizes Jacob in the text? Because he's a supplanter and once again, it shows the characteristic of even God's people who've taken on deceit. Jacob was treacherous in many ways. God saw his heart, but He says, "You're going to have to go through a lot in order for Me to use you."

So, what it says in in verse 25,

"For in a very little while My indignation against you will be spent and My anger will be directed..." "...towards the person that I put on you," which is Assyria. We're going to come back to Isaiah, but throughout Isaiah, you begin to see the details of the treachery and the things that were going on.

If you go back with me to Zephaniah, you see, it described this way,

(Zephaniah 3:4) "Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; Her priests have profaned the sanctuary. They have done violence..." That's an interesting word as well.

"They have done violence." What is he talking about? Well, he's clearly talking about the infidelity. He's clearly talking about the sense of acting like they're worshipping God but worshipping other gods and doing other things.

It says, "The LORD is righteous within her...Every morning He brings His justice..." (Zephaniah 3:5)

Then in verse 6, He establishes this interesting point which is,

"I have cut off nations;"

So, what God does first is He sends Assyria, and Assyria just starts lopping off all these other nations that have been the influence. It's sort of like, you have a bad influence in your kids, and you go, "I got to get rid of these people. So, either move or something, but we got to get them out." But then you find out your kids are that way, that the world has penetrated who they are so much that now they've become the very people that you move from.

So, the passage reads this way, in verse 6,

"I have cut off nations;

Their corner towers are in ruins.

I have made their streets desolate,

With no one passing by;

Their cities are laid waste,

Without a man, without an inhabitant.

(Zephaniah 3:7) "I said, 'Surely you will revere Me, Accept instruction.'

So her dwelling will not be cut off
According to all that I have appointed concerning her.
But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds."

That's a pretty intense passage, isn't it? You know, it's so easy, when you look at these pictures of nations and wars and God doing grand things on grand scales, it's very easy for us to kind of feel detached from who God really is and what's really happening. But let me just emphasize, and Scripture will interweave this, but for some reason we just keep it all separated; He'll interweave the relational always, and God will always come back as you know, the big crime is you hurt somebody. You hurt God. He's the one that loved you, and you have this picture like in Ezekiel, where God says, "I saw you like you were little babies squirming in its blood. I picked you up, I clothed you and I took care of you, I raised you and I gave you everything that you needed, and then you hated Me? I can't believe that." And you read in Hosea, where He goes, "How can I leave you? I mean, you've been cruel to Me, but I can't let you go."

Jeremiah, my son and I were talking, in fact, I think I was talking to somebody else about it too, about how David just couldn't kill Absalon. It's his son, and he knew what the solution was and really, if he were a just king, he needed to kill his son. He just couldn't do it, just couldn't do it; and the mayhem that began to occur because he was unwilling to do what was right. What's amazing is you put that alongside of God was willing to sacrifice His son, who knew no sin but became sin for us; and He did pull the trigger, for us. So, it's an interesting picture of the weakness that we have, and yet in the midst of it, how God is very gracious; even gracious to David throughout all of that.

There's a passage in Malachi that once again, emphasizes, if I can put it this way, the humanness of this and that's really what we're talking about. Malachi, if we're to kind of summarize, it is just man being disrespectful to God. God says, "Why are you disrespecting Me?" And then they turn back to God, and they go, "What do you mean disrespect? What are we doing?" Have you ever dealt with a kid that way? You go, "OK, you know you did something wrong." "What?" You're going, "Ok, are we really going there?" Because then they want time and they want details and of course, you get older, you go, "I can't remember everything." (Of course, they're kind of banking on that.)

Anyway, Malachi 2 begins to put it in the terms of relationship, and he specifically puts it in the terms of marriage. He deals with this word "covenant," and it is in this particular chapter where God says, "I hate divorce." So, if you ever want to know where that came from, it's in Malachi 2. The point of this particular chapter is that God had made a covenant of a close relationship with them; and the way He describes it in verse 5 is, "My covenant with him was one of life and peace." In this particular text, He's even specific with the Levite tribe, and how they've despised the covenant, so to speak. Then, He states this in verse 10,

"Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant."

What is He trying to get him to think? In terms of a relationship. Why are you doing violence to somebody you said you loved at one time?

It says in verse 11,

“Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

(Malachi 2:12) ‘As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob...’”

Once again, I mean, where's the forgiveness? Well, we know God's loving kindness is from everlasting to everlasting, but what you're dealing with here is a treachery that is so hard that the only thing that will speak to this person is something like this.

It goes on and says in verse 13,

“This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning...”

See, this is what's so bizarre, people think “If I just cry a lot then everything's going to be ok, everybody's going to forgive me.” What's bizarre is it becomes more about them than it does about the hurt and the pain that they've caused to somebody else, and the thought is, “Well, God will recognize my tears and my tears alone.” It's sort of like somebody walking down an altar or getting baptized. Well, that alone, that's a sign and that's what's going to do it. Well, all those are wonderful things, but there has to be the heart. God sees the heart.

So, if you look, he goes, “He no longer regards the offering.”

They're going, “Why don't you forgive me?” Well, because you're disingenuous and because you could care less how you hurt somebody. You're just thinking about yourself.

Here again, (Malachi 2:14) “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’”

When somebody's argumentative about how they've sinned, you know that you have a problem. Just admit that you've sinned and let's do the right thing.

“Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”

You see, once you begin to get treacherous towards God, you're treacherous towards everybody, and there is no sanctified religion; and by the way, the way you can tell that a person is right with God is that they're right with others. Yeah, and that's why it says in verse 16,

“I hate divorce,’ says the LORD.” Divorce was that which was used as a treacherous arm to hurt other people within the passage.

“So take heed to your spirit...” Isn’t that how it ends in verse 16?

“ Take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

I just think it's very interesting that it says, “take heed to your spirit.”

The point of Zephaniah is that all these external things have become internalized in the life of Judah, and they've tried to cover it up. They come to the altar, they go to the temple, in fact, according to Jeremiah, they say, “This is the temple of God. This is the temple of God.” He goes, “I'm not listening.” There's nothing sincere and it's a very simple point, but we're going to keep pounding it, God looks at the heart and He does care what goes on in there.

So, throughout the book, you see this battle that God begins to reveal and show the treachery of the heart and the fact that people are doing violence towards God and towards His people. The last time we met, we got as far as Zephaniah 3:7. So, we've got to go into verse 8 just to show progress. But you come into verse 8, and He begins to tell them what to do now. Sometimes, it seems as if well, “This is irreversible. There's no way out of this hole.” He says there is a way out and He's been pointing to that way out all along.

In fact, if you back up, and in Zephaniah 2:3, what's the solution again? Yeah, it's what you seek, right? What a strange phrase, because it just goes against our total nature to seek humility. We can seek money, we can seek a job, we can seek a career. We don't want to seek humility because that could be embarrassing. It could be humbling. Who wants to be humble in front of people? But humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt you. (1 Peter 5:6) That's where faith comes in, we actually believe that if we'll humble ourselves under God's mighty hand that He's not going to squash us. He's not going to take advantage of us. He's not going to shame us. He'll exalt us. It's that wonderful picture of Philippians 2, where Christ took on the form of a bond servant. Therefore, God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name. So, is He going to leave you behind if you humble yourself?

“Seek the LORD,

All you humble of the earth

Who have carried out His ordinances;

Seek righteousness, seek humility.”

Pursue the right things. Get your heart right. Get on the right track.

But in verse 8, he comes from a different angle of that, if I could put it that way, and this to me is very convicting. Mainly because the one thing I don't like to do is wait, and the “wait” that He has described in here, I really don't like doing. So, we're going to talk about this particular “wait” because actually this word that he uses within the passage, well, the best way to

remember is it sounds like a crow, “*hāḱâ*.” That's the best way to remember this particular word; but the word that He uses isn't used a lot in Scripture, but it is used in very unique places.

He tells him in verse 8 as he begins this phrase, “I see where you are. I see the fact that you've taken on the characteristics of the other nations. I see the fact that even though you see what happens when somebody does something wrong, you still go the wrong way. So, you can't be taught, right?” It's almost like the gavel of the judge is about ready to hit, and He goes, “I'm going to tell you what you can do.” You know, if the judge is about to enact something upon me, I'm all ears because I'm thinking, “Ok, what?” And He goes, “Wait. Wait.” Look at the passage,

“‘Therefore wait for Me,’ declares the LORD,
‘For the day when I rise up as a witness.
Indeed, My decision is to gather nations...’” (“...and I’m going to start doing something.”)

Now, the way that it's put in Isaiah, He says, “Hide yourself. Just be quiet, hide yourself and wait for Me.” When you think about righteousness and you think about getting your life right, it can almost be overwhelming, especially if you've messed your life up so horribly that you hardly know what's up. If somebody says, “You need to do the right thing.” Then you go, “What is that anymore? I don't even know what that is.” Because you're so confused. So, when wisdom comes in, it says, “Can you sit there and wait? Can you do that?” The wonderful thing about this directive is that anybody can wait. It's not saying that you have to do any magnificent work or anything. Anybody can sit there and wait for God to do a work. They can do that. So, God says that things are going to happen, and I'm not going to go through this chapter because I just want to focus on the one word “Wait,” but as you go through, the day is coming when you're not going to feel shame anymore. He says, “I'm going to remove the proud from your midst, (Zephaniah 3:11) and I'm going to bring you back and a remnant is going to come back and you're going to rejoice (Verse 14) with all your heart. Things are going to be great, but you have to wait.”

When you go back to Zephaniah 2:3,

“Seek the LORD,
All you humble of the earth
Who have carried out His ordinances;
Seek righteousness, seek humility...”

Watch the phrase:

“Perhaps you will be hidden
In the day of the LORD’S anger.”

How will you be hidden? If you wait. One of the great longings of God is that we love Him like He loves us. There's a passage in Hosea, of course, you're dealing with a relationship that is a

picture of just how treacherous God's people are against Him. But I want you to look, in particular, at Hosea 6. It starts off this way,

(Hosea 6:1) "Come, let us return to the LORD." See the phrase?

"For He has torn us, but He will heal us;
He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.

(Hosea 6:2) He will revive us after two days;
He will raise us up on the third day,
That we may live before Him."

That's a great passage, isn't it?

(Hosea 6:4) "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?
For your loyalty is like a morning cloud
And like the dew which goes away early."

Some people just can't be loyal. I don't know what it is, it must be a bad gene.

"Therefore I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets;
I have slain them by the words of My mouth;
And the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth."

What does God delight in more than anything? Loyalty. I love that about Him, fiercely loyal. When they use the word fiercely, you have to subdue that in the sense of it has to be for God, and you have to let God deal with that.

(Hosea 6:6) "For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice,
And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

All the way through Scripture, God is saying, "I keep telling you what I want and you're not listening to Me. I just want you to love Me. I want you to be true to Me. I want you to love Me more than that stuff. I want you to love Me more than this world. I want you to think like Me and love the things that I love. Is that so hard?" That's what God wants.

Oh yeah, I was going to give you the picture of "wait." So, turn with me to Isaiah 30. (I didn't actually forget, I'm just over-acting.) If you 'll look there with me, how sad it is that man is intent on doing evil. You know, you'd almost think in your mind, "Well, did God know that His people were going to be so mean?" God goes, "Yeah." In fact, He says in Isaiah 30:9,

"For this is a rebellious people, false sons,
Sons who refuse to listen
To the instruction of the LORD."

Yep, they're that kind of people.

It starts off in Isaiah 30:1,

“Woe to the rebellious children,” declares the LORD,
“Who execute a plan, but not Mine.”

(Isaiah 30:9) For this is a rebellious people, false sons,
Sons who refuse to listen
To the instruction of the LORD;

(Isaiah 30:10) Who say to the seers, ‘You must not see visions’;
And to the prophets, ‘You must not prophesy to us what is right,
Speak to us pleasant words...’”

“Say something nice to me. Every time I'm around you, you're always saying mean things and correcting me.” “Well, stop doing wrong and we'll stop correcting.”

“Who say to the seers... ‘Speak to us pleasant words,
Prophesy illusions.’”

“We don't care if it's true or not.”

(Isaiah 30:11) “Get out of the way...
Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.”

“I don't want to hear about righteousness.”

(Isaiah 30:12b) “And have put your trust in oppression and guile, and have relied on them,

(Isaiah 30:13) Therefore this iniquity...” Iniquity of deception.

You people think they can make up their own story and it's going to work out well. It's going to be “Like a breach about to fall, a bulge in a high wall, whose collapse comes suddenly.” There's nothing sturdy that you're building here. “So ruthlessly shattered.”

What is it that the Lord wants? Watch verse 15,

“For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said,
‘In repentance...’” We'll just stop there. He wants you to turn back. It's another word for conversion. The emphasis is to convert back to God's way, leave yours, go God's way.

So, “In repentance...” What's the next word? “Rest.” Now, the word that He uses here, “naḥat” is an interesting picture because it's the picture of when your arms are like moving around and everything like that and so it's a picture of dropping the arms. Now, what it means is that you're letting down your defenses and you're letting down your efforts. In other words, He's saying, “Ok, just stop. You're going the wrong way. Turn around.” You go, “Ok, now, what do You want me to do?” He goes, “Stop. Drop your hands. Do nothing. Can you do nothing?” Most of us are going “Yes, we can do nothing.”

“In repentance and rest you will be saved,

In quietness...” *“šāqat”* literally means to be still and totally inactive. “Who's going to save the world?” Not you today. You're just going to be quiet and inactive at this moment. “In quietness.” Inactivity, we'll put it this way, “and trust,” that is you're going to put all of your trust in Him doing something and not you. That's why you have to drop your hands. That's why you have to not move. Stop. This will be “your strength.” Ah, but you weren't willing to be still. The only thing you have to do is just sit still, do nothing. At least you're not getting in trouble when you're still. Can't even do that.

(Isaiah 30:16) “And you said, ‘No, for we will flee on horses... we will ride on swift horses.’”

It's not going to work out well for you, but verse 18 is the key verse that I want you to look at.

“Therefore, the LORD longs to be gracious to you,” That's the word “waits.” Let's put it another way, the Lord is waiting for you. He's waiting to be gracious to you. Now, I want to stop there for just a second. Do you know how hard it is to be gracious to somebody or to even want to be gracious to somebody that is doing everything that would repel them? It's what we would call painstaking. It hurts. Now, Scripture is not saying that God is going to be gracious to them. He says He's waiting to be gracious, which means He's stayed the judgment. He's waiting and in the process of waiting, this brings pain. How do we know? Because the word literally means to pierce, “wait.” So, He's being pierced. What's also interesting is it means to bind as well. So, it's a picture of binding and piercing together. That's God going, “I'm not giving up on you.”

The passage reads,

“He waits on high to have compassion on you.

For the LORD is a God of justice;

How blessed are all those who...” *“hākā,”* “wait” “for Him.”

God is wanting us to love Him back and there really isn't anything you or I can do that could impress Him. “I want to show my love for You. God, I'm going to work really hard.” “Ok. First of all, I didn't ask you to do that and secondly, you're going to wear yourself out.” We kind of go to that whole performance mode. What is one of the greatest ways that you can demonstrate your love for God? Here it is, you're willing to hurt in your waiting; because I can tell you that it hurts me not to do things at times. God says, “Will you wait?” “What do you mean by wait?” “Do nothing.” “What do you mean by that?” I mean, I'll keep asking all the questions. “Sit still. Stop. Now wait till I do something.” You and I both know that there are ferocious people, hateful people that do things against you, but God says, “Do you trust me?” And one of the greatest acts of trust is you dropping your hands, and going, “I'll just let Him take care of this.” Now, it's going to be piercing. It's going to hurt, but how blessed are all those who *“hākā,”* wait, are willing to be pierced out of, I would say loyalty, and out of “I believe God's going to do it.” God goes, “You do love me, don't you?”

See, we tie in love with performance, but it really isn't. Love is always tied directly to trust and the greatest way that you demonstrate that trust is by waiting on Him. Look, most of the problems that I've had in my life were just things I created myself. When I just stopped and I said, "Ok, God, I'm just going to let You..." I could imagine it was a stellar day in heaven. "Finally, he's just taking his hands off." How wonderful that is. *A day of rejoicing that will be.* You begin to realize the necessity of just stepping back and stepping away, instead of arguing with God.

The indictment of Psalm 106:13 is that they would not wait, and he uses this particular word. They would not "wait" for the counsel of God. I can tell you on many occasions that you know, I've tried to force things to work, or force justice or righteousness or whatever; but is that really believing that God can take care of it? I don't think it is.

Just to tie this with Isaiah 49:2, I know you all are familiar with this passage, but it just shows the love of God. You know, in Peter, where there's mockers. When's He coming? He's been saying this a long time. He's going to be coming, but God is not slow about His promises and is patient not willing that any should perish. Do you know how much pain He goes through waiting for people?

Isaiah 49:14, "But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me.'"

(Isaiah 49:15) 'Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.'"

Look how he describes it, "Behold, I have inscribed you..." "I pierced myself."

By the way, another word for "remember," "*zākar*" is piercing. If you say to yourself, "I'm having a hard time remembering not to move my hand over there," God goes, "Well, let me just stick a nail in it and see if you remember that?" You know, there's something about a piercing that just triggers the memory.

"Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands." "I won't forget you."

God hasn't forgotten us, but what He's asking for us to do is not to forget Him. "Oh yeah, I know You're in control." Are you willing to take a nail on that one? Does that mean you're willing to sit down and just drop your hands and wait? We mess up our lives. We think we can fix them but the best thing we can do is wait. I have found that God graciously works on my behalf. Many days I've woken up and He's fixed things that I'd messed up.

Psalm 33, and I'll close with this particular passage, reads this way in verse 18,

"Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope for His lovingkindness,

(Psalm 33:19) To deliver their soul from death
And to keep them alive in famine.

(Psalm 33:20) Our soul waits...” Would it surprise you that that's the word?

(Psalm 33:21) “For our heart rejoices in Him,
Because we trust in His holy name.

(Psalm 33:22) Let Your lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us,
According as we have hoped in You.”

By the way, in both cases, “hoped” is the same word as “wait.” It is willing to suffer for waiting. The problem is that we're not willing to sacrifice for the relationship, and it's the greatest way that we can tell Him that we love Him. “I'll wait for You.” Can you imagine a husband and wife being separated, and then the other one goes on with their life, and then the one comes back, and they go, “You didn't wait for me.” The argument would be, “Well, you don't know how hard it was.” “Yeah, but I thought that's what love did. It went through “hard” to demonstrate love.”

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your word and just the direction of the simplicity of “wait.” Lord, help us to walk in faith, not by sight. We pray this in Your name. Amen.