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Zephaniah 3:14-17

Zephaniah- everything has to go. There are things hidden, and those have to go too. So, this book begins to reveal to us the necessity of those things not only leaving but being revealed, and God certainly does that. The crazy thing is that it seems almost everything in this world can so easily take us off track; and the world is not our friend, we know that according to Jesus in the Gospel of John, and John reiterates it clearly in his epistles. We realize that we're not to be a friend of the world because the world's way of thinking is literally upside down. As we oftentimes quote the passage in Isaiah 5, they call good evil, and evil good; and we're seeing that more clearly now than ever before. The world influences us; as much as we would hope that it didn't, and say that it didn't, it does. So, the promise of Zephaniah is "I'm not going to let it influence you anymore. In fact, I'm going to get rid of everything, so it won't."

The thought initially is God is coming across pretty austere and cruel, but the ultimate end as we come into Zephaniah 3:14-17, we begin to understand why He's doing it; that we might have joy. You see, the problem is we actually think that the world is going to give us joy. I mean, they do promise that, and they're really good at their propaganda, very convincing. "You can be really, really happy if you just get this, or go this place, or do this thing," but it's just not true.

There's an interesting passage in the book of Proverbs, and in chapter 1 it starts off this way and you can feel the world beckoning. If you turn with me to Proverbs 1, you'll see what I'm talking about. In Proverbs 1:7, the cry is that "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction."

His main point is that if you don't listen to the wisdom of God then you're a fool; by not listening or adhering, you become incorrigible and unteachable. The very act of being teachable is actually showing that you are of humble spirit. When you say, "I don't want to hear it, I don't want to do it," that's the proud heart.

Well, the book of Proverbs starts off really, you can feel that it's written largely to the naïve, and he states that if you back up a little bit further in verse 5,

"A wise man will hear and increase in learning,
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,

(Proverbs 1:6) To understand a proverb and a figure,
The words of the wise and their riddles."

(Proverbs 1:4) "To give prudence to the naïve,
To the youth knowledge and discretion."

I remember when I was a teenager, I was pretty sure I knew everything. Later on, I was shocked that I didn't. You begin to realize that there is a lot of naivety in youth; just because you've

experienced some things, you feel like you've experienced everything, and it's just not true. Well, the problem is that you're very anxious for other people to accept you besides your family, because at this juncture you're looking outside of the home for affirmation. I'm going to put this mildly, you're basically sick and tired of your parents, and you're ready for some other excitement. So, you begin looking around for other people, and the world is very good at alluring. So, it starts off this way in verse 10,

"My son, if sinners entice you," don't listen to them, "do not consent," don't go with them.

(Proverbs 1:11) "If they say, "Come with us,
Let us lie in wait for blood,
Let us ambush the innocent without cause;

(Proverbs 1:12) Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,
Even whole, as those who go down to the pit."

Now, the fact of the matter is that people don't actually say that, but what he's saying is that it is their motive. Everything that their saying is, "you're going to get rich, have a lot of stuff, it's going to be a lot of fun." I remember one of my friends talked me into climbing on the church roof, and we thought we would throw water balloons at the traffic coming. We thought that was a good idea, until some guys stopped and started chasing us.

"If they say, "Come with us," don't go.

(Proverbs 1:13) "We will find all kinds of precious wealth,
We will fill our houses with spoil;

(Proverbs 1:14) Throw in your lot with us,
We shall all have one purse,"

"We're buddies, we're going to be your friends. Your parents aren't, we're going to be your friends. We have your best interest at heart" sort of thing.

(Proverbs 1:17) "Indeed, it is useless to spread the baited net
In the sight of any bird."

In other words, "I hate to say it, but birds are smarter than you buddy." "Bird brain" would actually be a compliment.

(Proverbs 1:18) "But they lie in wait for their own blood;
They ambush their own lives."

Scripture is saying that they take advantage of each other, and they're going to take advantage of you. I always think it's bizarre when you see somebody taking advantage of somebody else, and then that person says, "but they're not going to take advantage of me." Do you think

they're going to be faithful to you if they're unfaithful to that person? They already showed the flaw in their character.

(Proverbs 1:19) "So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence: It takes away the life of its possessors." (Proverbs 1:20) Wisdom cries in the street, and says, "Don't listen to them. Don't go there. Come on, this way."

So, the book of Proverbs is really about two women that are calling this naïve individual; "simple" is actually the word for naïve. You have "wisdom," who is the lady, then you have the harlot, who calls in the streets. The reason why it gives the picture of women is because they're alluring. So, it gives the picture of the allurements of the world, as well as the allurements of wisdom if you just listen to it. In other words, do you love this woman because she has character and integrity, and because she's going to be faithful and true, or do you love the person just because they flatter and lie to you? What is it that draws you? Whatever draws you is what you're attracted to.

All the way through the book of Proverbs, there's the great warning; as it goes on, it says, look, wisdom called but you didn't listen, and because of this, the day is coming when you're going to reap the consequences of following the wrong people. So, it reads this way in Proverbs 1:24, wisdom calls out,

"Because I called and you refused,
I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;

(Proverbs 1:25) And you neglected all my counsel
And did not want my reproof;"

"When the time comes, in your calamity I'm going to laugh at you." (Proverbs 1:26)

"I will mock when your dread comes,

(Proverbs 1:27) When your dread comes like a storm
And your calamity comes like a whirlwind..."

See, that's the thing, you think everything's going well, then all of a sudden... See? That's the way the trap goes. Everything looks pretty good until the trap closes.

(Proverbs 1:28) "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently..."

In other words, it's too late for wisdom to help you. You're already in the trap. Why?

(Proverbs 1:29) "Because they hated knowledge
And did not choose the fear of the LORD.

(Proverbs 1:30) They would not accept my counsel,
They spurned all my reproof.

(Proverbs 1:31) So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way
And be satiated with their own devices.

(Proverbs 1:32) For the waywardness of the naïve...

Once again, that's the emphasis of the text, "simple." "Oh, I thought they really liked me."

"... the naïve will kill them,
And the complacency of fools will destroy them.

(Proverbs 1:33) But he who listens to me shall live securely
And will be at ease from the dread of evil."

Well, it's a great passage, and a great reminder of how the world comes in. So, you can feel how our heavenly Father would maybe write something like the beginning of Zephaniah; and He sees the fact that His children are trapped in the way of the world, and He's got to get them out. I can just hear a father going, "Ok, everything goes," and I think that it's time for drastic measures, right?

(Zephaniah 1:2) "I will completely remove all things
From the face of the earth,' declares the LORD.

(Zephaniah 1:3) 'I will remove man and beast;
I will remove the birds of the sky
And the fish of the sea,
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," anything, everything that is causing them to stumble is the emphasis of the passage.

We see that at the end of the book, where God says, "I did this because I wanted you to have joy, and the world's taking this joy away." Once again, the world is telling you that they have the corner market on happiness. So, what's the "corner market on happiness"? Well, if you look in verses 5 and 6, He begins to talk about the things that they've allowed to come into their world. I just want to remind you that this is fundamentally Judah. Judah has been externally worshipping, going to the temple, doing all the things that look very religious, and yet when they go home, or go off in their little corners, they do whatever they want to do.

Just by way of reminder, if you look with me in Isaiah 1, you see this indictment against the Israelites. Once again, I think it's a bizarre thing that people oftentimes think, "Well, I think I've fooled God." I mean, that you fooled the pastor, or a teacher, or whatever, what does that matter? We really don't matter a hoot anyway, but it does matter that you tried to fool God. So, you can tell in Isaiah 1 that God's pretty upset at His people. He fundamentally says that their whole head is sick in verse 5. Here again, to put it mildly, they're a dumb ox, or dumb donkey. How do we know that? Well, He says in verse 3,

“An ox knows its owner,
And a donkey its master’s manger,
But Israel does not know,
My people do not understand.”

In other words, “the ox and the donkey are smarter than you.”

The point as He goes on, He says, “What makes you really stupid is you think you’re fooling me, and you think I’m pleased by your superficial way of worshipping; you think I’m good with that.”

(Isaiah 1:10) “Hear the word of the LORD,
You rulers of Sodom;
Give ear to the instruction of our God,
You people of Gomorrah.”

Now, He’s actually talking to Jerusalem. So, that’s a pretty intense indictment.

(Isaiah 1:11) “‘What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?’
Says the LORD. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.

(Isaiah 1:12) When you come to appear before Me,
Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?

(Isaiah 1:13) “Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me.
New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn
assembly.”

You know when people are going, “We’re being holy,” but they aren't genuine about it, yeah, we know what you’re doing when you walk outside.

“I hate all this stuff, and it wearies me.” (Isaiah 1:14)

(Isaiah 1:15) “So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you;
Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen...”

“I know what you’re doing.”

(Isaiah 1:17) Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan,
Plead for the widow.”

(Isaiah 1:18) “Come now, and let us reason together,” let’s do the right thing.

You can see that again in Isaiah 29, He cries out to His people, and He goes, “I’m really upset about everything that’s going on,” and He declares this in verse 13,

“Then the Lord said, ‘Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.’”

In other words, memorizing stuff. A lot of times people do what we oftentimes refer to as “hoop jumping.” So, a pastor tells you, “You need to do this.” Well, they jump through hoops, but they don’t really want to do the right thing. They’re just doing it to maybe get people off their backs. “They honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are removed far from me.” You can see the same thing in Amos; I’m just going to show you a couple of passages dealing with this, but in Amos 4:4 it reads this way,

“Enter Bethel...” Now, Bethel is a place that they declared to be the house of God.

Beth- house

El- God

So, house of God.

“Enter Bethel and transgress; In Gilgal multiply transgression!”

These are places that Israel would go to worship God in their own way.

“Bring your sacrifices every morning, Your tithes every three days.”

Who brings tithes every three days? Wow, that’s pretty righteous, isn’t it? I only bring mine once a week. “I do it three times a week.” That’s pretty cool.

(Amos 4:5) “Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened, And proclaim freewill offerings, make them known.”

What is God doing? I hate to tell you, He’s being sarcastic. God’s going, “Oh, come on, come on, bring your offerings. Do it three times a week, it doesn’t matter. Come on, worship Me. In fact, tell everybody that you’re worshipping Me.”

“For so you love to do, you sons of Israel,’ Declares the Lord GOD.”

If you have to announce your righteousness or blow your own horn, it isn’t true; and that’s clear in Matthew 6, isn’t it? “Don’t do your deeds to be noticed by men.” I’ve always thought this was an interesting passage in Amos, since we’re here, in Amos 6. You know how people love to sing spirituals, and they love to get really spiritual? It’s an interesting picture, if you look with me in Amos 6:4,

“Those who recline on beds of ivory And sprawl on their couches, And eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall,” in other words, delicacies.

(Amos 6:5) Who improvise to the sound of the harp, And like David have composed songs for themselves.”

(Amos 6:6) Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph."

They don't care about what's happening to people. No, but they are pretty much into entertainment, and they love the fact that they're on the stage singing songs. Does God know what's going on? Yes. The point of Zephaniah, in the very beginning, He goes, "I know what's going on, and I know when you go home, you're going on top of your housetops and you're worshipping the gods of Molech. You're willing to sacrifice your own kids to these gods, and yet you go into the temple on Sunday."

Jeremiah 7 would say, you go into Jerusalem, and you say, "Well, this is Jerusalem. This is a holy city." If you've ever seen the people that go to Jerusalem, and they have their phylacteries, (Deuteronomy 6) and their hats, and you begin to watch them; they look very, very religious. It is interesting that Revelation fundamentally calls Jerusalem Sodom and Gomorrah. So, don't think for one minute that just because something looks really religious, that it is.

Now, the point is you've allowed the world to infiltrate you, and in many respects, you've become worse than the world because you have committed an infidelity against God. You said that you loved Him, and now you lied. So, that makes things a whole lot worse. Peter will say, "It would be better had you not even done anything, be better you hadn't even known. Then after knowing the way of the truth, then to go against God. "

Romans 2 is very clear that if in fact you proclaim the name of God, and then you do the opposite, you're blaspheming the name of God. How do you think God feels about that? It would actually be better if you were in ignorance. Probably one of the reasons why Jesus is far more patient with the sinful person, i.e., in Scripture, and very short with the Pharisees and those that pretend to be religious.

As you come into the beginning of the chapter, you see the arrogance really dripping from them, and you see it coming out of what the world says is going to bring happiness to you. What do you think the world says happiness comes from? Idolatry. Now, to explain what idolatry is all about, there's an interesting passage in Colossians 3:5. We're not going to turn there, but I am going to read you what he states. He states this, that fundamentally immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire (which basically is selfish ambition), and greed amounts to idolatry. Here again, man is saying, "Oh, no, no, I'm just worshipping another god." Everybody knows that's not true. You've invented a god so that you can do what you want to do; that's the only reason you invented the god. What is that "god" that you're really worshipping? Well, you know "in the last days, perilous times will come." How does that start off? Men will be lovers of self. So, what's that "god" that your worshipping? Self. "Lovers of money."

As you go into the passage, you begin to see that immorality, impurity when they go on the housetops, and they swear by Milcom. Molech would be another way of putting it; where they would sacrifice their children on the altar. That was a very immoral kind of worship. Once again, why would they like to worship Molech? Because they like immorality.

The world is saying that if you're really loose with your morals, that you're going to be really happy. But if you think about what immorality is about, it's seeing people as a commodity to satisfy what you want. So, you're not really seeing them as human beings, you're not caring for them, you're fundamentally saying, "what can I get out of this person?" One of the reasons why God hates it so much, because you're taking advantage of somebody to get what you want.

When it comes to a marriage bond, you come in, and one of the commitments of the husband is that he'll love you in sickness and in health, till death does he part, right? According to Ephesians 5, he will love you to the degree of giving his own life for you. Well, that's called caring. Caring in the long run, and I'm talking in the long run, is going to bring far more joy than selfish ambition for the moment.

So, all the things that the world promises, whether it's immorality or impurity, or whatever passion you have, is fundamentally a kind of selfish ambition. And I've never known a selfish person to be happy. I've met a selfish person that found a kind of happiness in using people, but he really wasn't happy; because happiness doesn't come from these things, although, the world will say that it does. That evil desire, and ultimately the greed, the thought is, "If I could just get more of it, I'm going to be really, really happy." How many people have killed themselves that had probably far more than we could ever imagine? How many people have died of overdose because they've gone into that realm thinking that's going to make them happy. It's always very disturbing when I see in particular, a young person gets a lot of money really fast because you know they can't handle it, besides the fact that if they think that's what is going to bring them happiness, they're going to be sorely disappointed; and that's what Scripture referred to as "shame." In other words, shame comes into their life, and the shame that it's talking about is that you come to the end of the road that you pursue, and you say, "Wow, am I disappointed." That's the shame he's talking about. You become disappointed in the thing that you were hoping was going to bring you happiness, and you find that the very thing that was going to bring you happiness is the very thing that is causing misery in your life. So, the world is promising all these things; and what he basically says at the beginning of the chapter, and as you come into 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13, he says, "I see you at your gates, and I see you at your business, and there's going to be a lot of crying there; there's going to be a lot of unhappiness there.

Unfortunately, the thought is that in my greed, if I have enough money, I'm going to be safe. I'm going to be secure; and the world is telling you that. I don't know what it is now, I remember a number of years ago, they were telling people that you had to have a certain amount of money in order to retire; because if you don't have enough money, you'll probably be living on the streets. The amount that they were talking about, I'm going, "Ok, that's not going to happen." Well, so far, I'm not living on the streets. So, I'm really glad about that.

In Zephaniah 1:14-18 he's saying that the day of hardship is coming. What do you think your money is going to save you? It's not going to save you. It says this in verse 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."

So, He then turns to them, and he says, "Ok, let's gather all the nations." It's an interesting picture in Chapter 2, "Let's gather all the nations." We've talked about all this before, but I just want to bring it all into context. He calls basically three groups of nations together; and the reason He does that is it's like class time, "you've been ensnared, you've been entrapped, the world has allured you," and He goes, "Ok, these are the three traps that you want to look out for..." So, He begins to describe them. The first one is Philistia, the Philistines, and that's a pretty interesting trap; let me just say this, they're all fueled by this force called pride. So, every one of them, when the world allures you, is talking from the realm of pride. They're fundamentally saying, "this will make you rich," or "this will make you powerful," "this will make you happy," "we've got the answer." Then arrogance begins to talk, and it instills a sense of restlessness in peoples' lives. Do you ever wonder why people are restless? Here again, the world is saying, "this is the way to go," and you start going that way, and you find yourself going, "man, I'm just not happy, I'm restless." So, the world says, "Well, you know what you need, don't you?" "No, what do I need?" They go, "More. You need more."

In Zephaniah 2:4-7, the Philistines are that picture of pursuing more, and in an aggressive, hostile way. If you ever want a picture of the Philistines, just picture pirates on steroids, and that would be the Philistines. They were a maritime people, and oftentimes directly connected to Canaan. It says in verse 5, "O Canaan, land of the Philistines."

"Canaanites" emphasizing that they're traders, or more specifically that they traffic on the seas. Many times, "Canaan" will be translated "merchants." It's described in Scripture that in some cases they did human trafficking. Selling people. So, that's pretty ambitious if you think about it. "Let's see, how can I make money? I know! I'll sell my uncle." I don't know who came up with these ideas.

If you look at Zephaniah 2:4-5, starting in verse 4, it lists the names of the main cities of the Philistines. Gaza, which means the strong ones. Ashkelon means migrants coming from a seaport. Then Ashdod, which makes reference to powerful. Ekron means to pull up by its roots. If you look at the passage, it says, "Ekron will be uprooted." He's saying that they were a kind of people that enjoyed uprooting people and using them. They would come into your territory, and just take it. Why? Because they can. They knew no boundaries, and that's why they were so hated. In fact, if you look in verse 5,

"Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, The nation of the Cherethites," which is referring to the island of Crete.

So, all the way through here, you see the kind of people that they are. Scripture is telling us that this source of pursuing something to fill your emptiness. The world will tell you, "You're feeling empty? Ok, we got more." So, this is what you do, you become aggressive, hostile, and it doesn't matter who you step on, who you push over, or who you hurt to get what you want. It's basically sales. I was in sales long enough to know that wow, there's a user market, and I'm not saying that everyone who is a salesman is that way, but what I am saying is that they push it. I remember one of the head salesman, he goes, "When you see somebody walk on that lot, this is the way I want you to think, they have money in their pocket, that's your money in their pocket. You've got to get it out." I'm going, ok, I don't belong here. The passage is making reference to the fact that the world is saying, "Do you want to cure this emptiness that you have?" You're going, "Yeah." "Ok, let's go for it. Let's get all that we deserve," and we buy it, hook, line, and sinker.

If you look in verse 8, he talks about the "taunting of Moab" and the "revilings of the sons of Ammon." Let's just put the Moabites and the Ammonites in the category of failures. These are the children of Lot. We know that the whole scene was horrific, and they try their whole life to deal with their failures in the wrong way. So, we all have emptiness, and we oftentimes try to deal with it in the sense of going after more like the Philistines; and we all have failures, and unfortunately, oftentimes in that failure of our life, we perceive that the best way (which the world is basically going to tell you) to deal with your failure is to tear down everybody else around you; because if you do that, then you're going to look a lot better. This is where gossip comes in. People don't like things that are going on in the church, so what do they do? They failed in some way, so what do they do? Tear down somebody else.

If you look in the passage, the words that are used, 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."

Once again, we know that these are the kids from Sodom and Gomorrah; it says that in verse 9. If you drop on down to verse 10, "they will have in return for their pride," once again, we know that's what is fueling all this, "because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people."

"The best way to deal with your failures is to be critical, and to reproach other people, and this will help you save face. Get the attention off you, stick it on somebody else because you're a failure." Well, we know that the best way to deal with failure is just admit that you're a failure, and come before the Lord; but once again, the world has infiltrated us.

Then, he ends in verse 12-15 with the Assyrians and Egypt, and you begin to realize that the world not only can't handle emptiness, they can't handle failure, but surprisingly enough, the world can't handle success. When you think of Assyria and Egypt, and you think of the pyramids

and all the things they've built, you go, "Ok, are you guys happy?" and they go, "No, we want to rub it in."

I don't know when this happened, and I don't want to be too cruel to football players, but when did all the dancing happen when you made a touchdown? It used to be they just threw the ball at the ground, that was it, and it bounced, and ok, you've made a touchdown; but now, we're taking pictures and posing, and I'm going, "Wow, that's really a bad winner." They just rub it in the face, and that's the picture, if you understand with the Assyrians and the Egyptians, they just couldn't let it go. If you look in verse 15, they're called "the exultant city." They go around going, "We're bad, nobody else is better than us," and "I am, and there is no one besides me." They dwell securely, and say in their hearts, "I'm certainly the best, and unequaled by anybody." They are contemptuous towards people around them. They look down on them. Well, the world will tell you that's success; that you should deal with success in that way. Instead of giving thanks to God, from whom all blessings flow, "No, no, no, wave it under their nose, laugh at them because they're not as good as you, and have that superiority complex, and that's the way you handle success." The point of these things, it's like God's gathered the nations and He has them standing up there, "Look at these guys here. What's wrong with this picture? By the way, while you're looking at these guys, I want to ask you one simple question, is anyone happy?" See, because all these things that the world does, they're trying to tell you that you're going to be happy. I mean, step on people, abuse people, laugh at people, make fun of people, "It's going to bring such joy in your life. Elevate yourself." I've found anytime that I elevate myself or pursue selfish desires it just makes me feel yucky, that's probably the nice way to put it.

In Zephaniah 3, He turns to them, and He goes, "So, why do you think you look so bad? You took on their nature." And He calls Jerusalem the "tyrannical city" because quite frankly there's have become a tyranny because of their infidelity, their unfaithfulness to God. He goes, "Look, you heeded no voice, you didn't accept My instruction, you didn't trust in Me. (Zephaniah 3:2) You listened to the world, you didn't listen to Me, and because of that your priests are violent, (Zephaniah 3:4) they take advantage of people, and they steal from people. You can't trust anybody. What, are you happy now?" So, you begin to see just how horrible all this is, and how it just produces misery.

The way Isaiah 24:10 says, he calls them "the city of chaos." Then, in Isaiah 25:2, he calls it "a palace of strangers." So, what does the world produce? It's produced a great city. Ok, what's the city like? Well, it's chaotic. What else is the city like? It's a city of strangers. Are you happy there? I don't think so. Isaiah 25:3 will refer to it as a "ruthless" city that is taking advantage of people.

There seems to be no shame, we're seeing that probably more now than ever. In fact, the end of Zephaniah 3:5 says, "the unjust knows no shame." So, God took these three guys, He put them on the stage, metaphorically, then He wipes them out. I can just see Him looking at everybody, and He goes, "Ok, so what do you think? Do you think you're going to be successful?"

Look at these guys, they're wiped out. So, what do you think?" Jerusalem goes, "I think we'll just continue going the way we're going."

(Zephaniah 3:6) "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...But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds."

So then, God turns to them, and He goes, "Ok, so this is what you need to do, you have to wait. Just stop doing everything. Just stop everything, I'm going to do a work." Now, the question is what is the work that He's going to do, and what is that which He set off to do from the very beginning? His work is to get all of this evil out of them that is really taking their joy away, and He wants to bring them into the city of joy.

What is the new Jerusalem really about? Well, it's about God dwelling among us, and the Psalmist puts it this way, in His presence is fullness of joy. So, it's God dwelling with us, and you'll see it repeated in the passage we're looking at tonight, in verses 14, 15, 16, and 17. In particular, if you look at the middle of verse 15, "The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst." verse 17, "The LORD your God is in your midst." Now, how does it start off? Verse 14, "Shout for joy." The answer that alludes to us is, where does joy come from? It has to come from the Lord. We can say that, and yet probably not really know how that works because that's kind of one of those pat answers, "Well, joy comes from the Lord, it says so in the Bible."

Ecclesiastes says to me about as good as any other book. So, if you look with me in Ecclesiastes 2 because if you remember Solomon, if anybody had a lot of money to try to buy happiness, he could've. He thought he would try to be happy just getting drunk; maybe just drinking a lot would make him happier. He builds parks for himself, when he built parks, it was like states, great parks (Ecclesiastes 2:5). He made ponds of water (Ecclesiastes 2:6), bought male and female slave (Ecclesiastes 2:7), and collected gold (Ecclesiastes 2:8). Who does that? The amount of gold that he collected and the silver that he had was like pavement. He had so much. He didn't need a radio, he just had a big choir. Isn't that what he says in verse 8?

"Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines."

Of course, a lot of wives. When you get into the five hundred range, I'm going, "That's a little excessive, maybe 499 not so much." As he comes to the end of this, there's a realization. He says this in verse 25, "For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?" That's an interesting question.

(Ecclesiastes 2:26) For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy..."

Joy is a gift. It's not something you can make happen. The world is telling you it's a commodity, something that you buy, or by pursuing certain things, by doing certain things, jumping through certain hoops, or by thinking the way they think. It's not true; all you have to do is look at the carnage behind everybody's philosophy. That's all you have to do. If you have the advantage of living as long as I have, you can actually see the death behind all of those interesting philosophies. I mean, I outlived Dr. Spock. I outlived Him. "Oh, kids are fundamentally good, they're really nice people, just let them have their way. They're going to be really good." Ok, that didn't work out. So, as you look in this, you begin to realize, ok, I need to be pleasing to God because God is the one that gives. I mean, if I'm good in His sight, He goes, "Here." and I'll tell you ladies and gentlemen, I have felt that happiness literally injected in my veins. There have been days where I'm going, "Ok, I'm just about as miserable as I can get." and I come before God, I humble myself, and I begin praying. Then, I just stand up with peace and joy. Where does that come from? It's better than heroin. I haven't tried it.

Zephaniah 3:14, "Shout for joy." See, this is what He's been doing. Why does God need to remove all of this stuff out of our lives? You know those days when you didn't get what you wanted? Thank God because that would be something that would've held back joy in your life. So, He's yanking stuff out. Look, the tighter you're holding on, the worse it's going to feel.

"Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!"

All these words are very descriptive. The phrase "shout for joy" is actually, have you ever been in the Middle East and heard the warriors cry? It's a victory cry, and that's what is being used in that part with "daughter of Zion." Just a side note with "Zion," we believe according to Scripture that towards the end days the temple is going to be built. They tell us that the foundation has already been laid, but the whole debate and argument is that in Zion, on Mount Zion, where they designate Bariah, the mosque of Omar is there where the temple should be. They're finding out that's not true, pretty interesting. I won't go into a lot of detail about this, but Zion is another name, if you talk about it in its specific text, Zion can mean the whole broad Jerusalem, all of the people in Jerusalem, and a place of worship. It's a metaphor for many things, but if you talk about Zion in specific, it literally is the city of David. Now, I know that most of us go, "Yeah, I know, that's Jerusalem, the city of David." The city of David is south of Jerusalem. As you look at the southern region of where the city of David originally is, and that was Jebus where he was going to take over. Obviously, there's nothing planted there, I just think that's interesting.

“Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O Israel!”

There’s another word here in the text, jumping up and down. I remember jumping up and down on a really good surf. We’d out on a 4’, 6’, tubing, glassy wave. We’d just be jumping. Have you ever been that excited before? We’re doing backflips in the water, and all sorts of stuff. Have you ever felt that good? You’re going to feel better than that. Can you imagine feeling better than that? Why? There are two things that will bring you joy, and here they are, all the judgement, all the guilt of all of the bad things that you’ve ever done, gone. The Lord has taken away His judgements against you. Wow. That’s amazing.

David, as we’ve oftentimes made mention of, in Psalm 32 said, “You know what? I stopped lying about my sin, and I just confessed it,” and he said, “You know all that upset in my stomach, and all that upset in my body and how my body wasted away? It’s gone. I feel better.” It’s amazing how much joy you can actually get from just confessing your sins. I say “just,” all you have to do is humble yourself. Fundamentally, that’s the cure all the way through this book. If you back up into Zephaniah 2:3, what does he tell the people to do?

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

Humble would mean that you’re not incorrigible, that you are correctable. In other words, if somebody tells you you’re doing something wrong, you go, “Thank you,” instead of throwing rocks or yelling at them.

“Seek righteousness, seek humility.
Perhaps you will be hidden.”

That’s one of the great themes of the book, that God hides those who are His.

If you look in Zephaniah 3:12, the day is coming when “I will leave among you
A humble and lowly people.”

So, what is He actually going to do? Well, if you look at verse 11,

“In that day you will feel no shame
Because of all your deeds
By which you have rebelled against Me;
For then I will remove from your midst
Your proud, exulting ones...”

What is He removing? Go back to chapter 1, “I’m going to remove anything that is high and proud and exulting.” You see that same theme in Isaiah 2.

“And you will never again be haughty
On My holy mountain.”

We talked about this, there won't be any proud people in heaven. That's going to make heaven by itself.

(Zephaniah 3:12) “But I will leave among you
A humble and lowly people,
And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.

(Zephaniah 3:13) The remnant of Israel will do no wrong
And tell no lies,
Nor will a deceitful tongue...”

In other words, they're not going to try to talk their way out of things, they're not going to smooth talk, or invent things. Some people are really sharp, and you can trick other people. The caveat is you just can't trick God, and He's the only one that counts.

I won't go too much into this, but I think one of the most interesting passages to me in the New Testament is in Acts 5, with Ananias and Sapphira. They lied about what they were giving to God, and we would go, “Oh, no big deal. Maybe they didn't give what they said they were going to give, but they gave something.” God goes, “Yeah, but you lied to Me.” This is the one thing that I can't understand how people don't seem to care that you lied to God. They're going to get really ticked off that you lie to them, but you lie to God and, “Ok, so what? No big deal.” Well, God thinks it's a big deal. If you remember, Ananias just drops dead because he lies. If you follow the text, Peter then goes to Sapphira, and she doesn't know what happened, he goes, “Ok, did you sell the land for such and such, or not?” Now, what's interesting is he didn't ask her to squeal on her husband, but he didn't ask her to agree with him. I think some women get this kind of confused, “I need to protect my husband.” Wait, what you need to do is be right with God, and if your husband does something wrong, I really don't see anything in Scripture that says you're supposed to throw him under the bus, but I don't see anything in Scripture that says you need to protect him and cover up for him, you tell the truth. She doesn't. What happens? I've seen this with people, “I'm going to be loyal to this friend.” I wouldn't do that if I were you. I'd be loyal to God. So, the point of the passage is we're not going to be deceptive, we're just going to be clear with God, and we're going to be right with God. It's going to be with the right heart; and that's what's going to bring joy. When you do that, your sins are forgiven.

1 John 1:9, if you say you have no sin, you're lying; but if you just confess your sins, then He is faithful and just and will forgive you, cleanse you of all unrighteousness, and guess what? Happiness and joy will come. Here again, let me just emphasize this one point, you've got to get rid of everything. You can't come to God, and go, “80 percent, I feel pretty good about that.” You're not going to feel good about it. Happiness isn't going to come with 80 percent. So, the Lord is taking away His judgements against you.

Now, watch the next phrase, “He has cleared away your enemies.” That’s the second thing that will bring joy. Isn’t that great? In both cases it’s all God. God completely takes away your sins, only God does that, and only God can take away your enemies. One of the ways that He takes away your enemies, in Proverbs 16:7 is that if your ways are pleasing to God, He makes even your enemies to be at peace with you. So, He can change your enemy into somebody that is at least an advocate or a helper. We also know according to Psalm 118:6 that if the Lord is for us, we don’t need to fear because what can man do to us? Philippians 1:28, it’s like the tables are even turned. People begin to get intimidated if you’re right with God, and they’ll back off from threatening you. Have you ever had that happen? I’ve had some people that were pretty upset with me. I don’t know why, I’m such a likeable guy; but I’ve watched the Lord back them off. It’s bizarre because you see fear in their eyes, and that’s what he’s talking about. In fact, Peter will say, don’t fear their intimidation, and Paul will say in Philippians 1:28, they’re going to be afraid of you. That’s quite a twist; but the point is that if God is for us, who can be against us? Psalm 23 says that He’s going to set a table in the presence of our enemies. So, you’re going to be eating, “Aren’t you a little worried?” “No.” In fact, God’s going to anoint your head in front of them all, and they’re going to say, “Ok, we don’t mess with this guy.” I like Psalm 23, don’t you?

(Zephaniah 3:16) “In that day it will be said to Jerusalem:

“Do not be afraid, O Zion;

Do not let your hands fall limp.”

You don’t have to be afraid, or discouraged, there’s not going to be a sense of hopelessness.

“The Lord is victorious in your midst.” (Zephaniah 3:17)

Isaiah talks about this in Isaiah 59. Have you ever seen that bumper sticker, “No peace, no joy, and then know peace, know joy”? So, in this passage it’s talking about the fact that the wicked can’t know peace. Why? Because they’re pursuing it in all the wrong places. The beginning of Isaiah 59 says, “What, do you think that the Lord can’t save you?” “Oh, He’s too far away. He’s way up in heaven.” You don’t think He’s omnipresent? “The LORD’S hand is not so short that it cannot save.” What’s the problem according to verse 2? It’s your sins that have separated you. Why are you not happy? You’re separated from God, the same reason Adam and Eve weren’t happy and were hiding. If you go to the passage, he goes, “Your hands are defiled, your iniquity, your falsehood, wickedness, you’re taking advantage of people. (Isaiah 59:3) You trust in confusion.

(Isaiah 59:4) No one sues righteously and no one pleads honestly.

They trust in confusion and speak lies;

They conceive mischief...”

You go, “Why isn’t it working?” I guess I shouldn’t be hatching eggs of snakes or making spider webs and trapping people. (Isaiah 59:5) It even says your clothes are like traps. (Isaiah 59:6)

(Isaiah 59:7) “Their feet run to evil,

And they hasten to shed innocent blood;

Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity,
Devastation and destruction are in their highways.”

“Why am I not happy? I hate people, I kill people, I grab everything for myself. Why am I not happy?”

It says in verse 8,

“They do not know the way of peace,
And there is no justice in their tracks;
They have made their paths crooked,
Whoever treads on them does not know peace.

(Isaiah 59:9) Therefore justice is far from us,
And righteousness does not overtake us;
We hope for light, but behold, darkness,
For brightness, but we walk in gloom.”

What he’s going to be talking about is you’ve inherited hopelessness, confusion, despair, guilt, regret, depression, anger, hostility; all these things you’ve inherited because you pursued them.

(Isaiah 59:10) “We grope along the wall like blind men,
We grope like those who have no eyes;
We stumble at midday as in the twilight...”

“We’re confused. We don’t know which way is up.” That’s because you confused up.

The end of verse 11, “We hope for justice, but there is none,
For salvation, but it is far from us.”

What’s the solution? Well, verse 13,

“Transgressing and denying the LORD,
And turning away from our God,
Speaking oppression and revolt,
Conceiving in and uttering from the heart lying words.”

Justice is far from us, and truth is stumbling in the streets. (Isaiah 59:14) Truth is lacking. (Isaiah 59:15) We need a Savior. So, the way it reads at the end of verse 15, “Now the LORD saw,
And it was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice.”

(Isaiah 59:16) “And He saw that there was no man,
And was astonished that there was no one to intercede;
Then His own arm brought salvation to Him,
And His righteousness upheld Him.

(Isaiah 59:17) He put on righteousness like a breastplate,
And a helmet of salvation on His head..."

In a way that's basically what Zephaniah is saying. The LORD is in your midst, He comes with great power to save. So, how do you get happy? You get rid of your sins, you come to God, and entrust your enemies to Him. I would say, enemies are not just those people that are enemies, it's whatever is taking you into the realm of darkness. That's your enemy, and God can deliver you from evil, but you're going to have to trust in Him and wait on Him to do it. We actually believe that the greatest thing that we can do is get right with God and trust in Him. We believe that's what is going to rescue us. Go all the way back to Moses, there he is standing by the water, ok, let's just think this thing through, how is he going to get saved? What kind of human reasoning is going to rescue him as the Egyptians approach him?

No matter how strong, or how powerful, or how controlling you are there's going to be something that comes in your life, cancer, heart attack, I can go down the list, or more people than you can handle; something is going to come in your life that's going to be too big for you. It's sad that people won't realize it before that happens, but you and I believe that we're just going to get right with God, our hearts are going to be right. God's going to then cause things to work together for good. I'm going to trust Him. I'm going to cultivate faithfulness. I'm going to do good, and I'm going to please Him. When I please Him, not only will He eradicate my enemies and forgive my sins, but He'll put joy in my heart. People need to be a little happier.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your word and the promises that You give us; and Lord just the simplicity of just being right with You. Believing that it's by Your power that things are taken care of. I mean, we know that we don't control the sun, and we know that we don't control the lightning, and we know that we don't control the earthquakes. I mean, these things are bigger than us, but how strange it is that we think we do control some things. You want to bring us to the point of just trusting in you for all things. In fact, you tell us to trust in You with all of our hearts, and never, never, never lean on our own understanding; in all of our ways we need to acknowledge You. Then You'll put us on the path of not only life, but joy. Lord, help us to get right with You. We pray this in Your name, Amen.