

Don't Be Complacent; Seek the Lord! Zephaniah 1:1-3:20

Have you ever had Turkish coffee?

- The first thing that comes to mind when I think about it is **the sludge** that sits at the bottom of it. [pic, looks good, eh?]
- The coffee is made differently. The grounds float in the drink, and eventually a layer of “**sludge**” settles at the bottom of the cup.
- “**The sludge dregs**” settle there. “**Dregs**” is what we call the **nasty stuff in a drink**.
- **It's the least wanted portion of the drink, the residue.**
- **You kids may have seen this in the bottom of Hot Chocolate.**
- **Wine drinkers and makers understand dregs; they settle at the bottom during the aging process and are not to be shaken up so the wine can age properly.**
- **Zephaniah uses the idea of “dregs,” “gunk,” as an illustration of complacency.**

**You don't want to drink the dregs.
It's even worse to be the dregs!**

Look at **1:12**.

¹² At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I will punish the men
who are **complacent**,
those who say in their hearts,
'The LORD will not do good,
nor will he do ill.'

- **ESV footnote that says, “are thickening on the dregs” [of their wine].**
 - **Inactivity is good for aging wine; but not for professing believers.**
 - **We must not thicken in complacency, in uselessness.**
- The **CSB** translates it as those **“who settle down comfortably”**
 - There are **people that have floated to the bottom, good for nothing, sludge.**
- **NASB: “stagnant in Spirit.”**
- The complacent are filled with unbelief, due to their pathetic view of God.
 - “He won't do anything.”
 - What a contrast from the rest of the book, where we read God is active, and that he will judge the whole earth! That he is “awesome” (2:11); filled with “burning anger” toward the proud (2:2); and that he sings passionately over his people (3:17)!

This is a real temptation isn't it? **This was the condition of many in Zephaniah's day.**

Complacency is mentioned after the sins of idolatry in 1:6:

⁶ those who have turned back from following the LORD,
who do not seek the LORD or inquire of him.” (1:6)

They had grown complacent in response to the word of the Lord.

² She listens to no voice;
she accepts no correction.
She does not trust in the LORD;
she does not draw near to her God. (3:2)

- They were self-reliant; they had no need of God or his word.
- Their failure to seek the Lord, didn't mean that they didn't worship a god – for they did what humans do, they worshiped other things...

1:12: “the Lord will not do ill, and the Lord will not do good.”

- This was their view of God.
- Nothing *good* or *bad* is going to come.
- **“It doesn't matter what you do! The Lord won't do anything!”**
- “The Lord won't bless the righteous; the Lord won't punish the wicked.”

Have you ever thought that?

- “The Lord really isn't going to do good for me.”
- Why obey? It won't make any difference...
- Why pray? He won't act...
- Why read the Bible? It makes no difference.
- Why get counseling? That won't do any good.
- Why show up on a Sunday?

What is behind all of this? It is unbelief. It's practical atheism.

- **Prayerlessness is unbelief.**
 - It's the belief that nothing good will come if I pray, nor bad if I don't.
 - As if you don't need the God who raised Christ from the dead!
- **Refusing counsel is tied to unbelief.**
- **Not reading Scripture is tied to unbelief.**
- **Not valuing the preached word, or the importance of the church is unbelief.**
- **Dreg Religion is dangerous and deadly.**
- **Dreg Church Goers are practical atheists.**

Beware of spiritual complacency.

- This is not *contentment* – contentment in Christ is right.

We need to do this instead, the central exhortation in the book: 2:3

³ Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land,
who do his just commands;
seek righteousness; seek humility;
perhaps you may be hidden
on the day of the anger of the LORD.

**Around this call we find a bunch of warnings, and a glorious promise at the end.
These are the reasons/incentives for seeking the Lord.**

Don't be complacent; don't live in unbelief; seek the Lord!

- “Seek the Lord and live” (**Amos 5:4-6**)

So let's think about this together...

Features

The "**day of the Lord**" is the overriding theme, much like Joel

- A day of judgment and salvation – immediate and future
- His predictions involve the immediate judgment on Judah carried out by **Babylon**, and the ultimate judgment and salvation at the end of the age.

1:1: He prophesied during the reign of **Josiah** (640-609).

- It was probably **early during his reign** because Nineveh was still a power (2:13-15); and **the severe condemnation of Judah suggests that Josiah's reforms had not taken place yet.**
 - They found the book of the Law and there was revival – not everyone was revived, but it was a time of renewal. (2 Chron 34; 2 King 23)
 - **How complacent were they? They didn't even know where the Bible was, and for some fifty plus years no one seemed to miss it!**
- The wickedness addressed in Zephaniah grew out of the previous administrations of **Manasseh and Amon.**
- Zephaniah was part of the reform movement.

Zeph was a contemporary of **Nahum** and **Jeremiah**.

- He was probably a member of **Hezekiah's** royal family.
 - He mentions that perhaps because he's going to say so many hard things to them.
- Some think this book is kind **of a summary of the pre-exilic prophets.**
- **Haggai, Zech and Malachi are post-exilic.**
- **There are two major divisions.**
 - Prophecies of **Judgment** (1:1-3:8)
 - Prophecies of **Blessing/Salvation/Hope** (3:9-20)

I'm going to break these two units up into 5 theological principles that display God's severity and kindness; his grace and justice; his wrath and mercy; judgment/salvation:

These are five incentives for seeking the Lord.

- 1. God alone is worthy of worship (1:2-6)**
- 2. God is Just in his judgments (1:7-18)**
- 3. God is merciful to the humble (2:1-3)**
- 4. God will judge the nations (2:4-3:8)**
- 5. God promises a glorious future to his people (3:9-20)**

#1: God Alone Is Worthy of Worship (1:2-6)

This first section opens with judgment coming on Judah, and here we see God's call for exclusive worship.

2-3: This is a description of de-creation.

- It is judgment given in the most terrible way.
- It is reminiscent of the flood.

4-6: “stretched out hand” Ex 3:19-20:

¹⁹ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.
²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go.”

• **Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth! (Tyson/Pharaoh).**

Then Zephaniah highlights three different sins; reasons for the Lords’s stretched out hand:

1. **Idolatry (v. 4) – Seeking a different god**
2. **Syncretism (5) – Seeking Yahweh *and* superstitious figures or Milcom/King (a pagan deity is in view)**
3. **Apathy (6) – Not Seeking God**

Idolatry (1:4)

The uniqueness of God and by extension the uniqueness of Christ is essential to our faith.

- It’s not something we declare because we think we are **somehow smarter or better**.
- **It’s a central tenant of our faith; to deny it, is to deny our faith.**
- It’s the very essence of our faith to believe **that every knee will bow to Jesus Christ.**
- Our culture doesn’t like this.
- **Sometimes people assume we think other religions should be *illegal*; that is not our position. We affirm religious liberty.**
- True worship cannot be coerced by the law.
- **But that doesn’t mean we think shirk back from declaring that Christ is the only way of salvation.**
- Look at Zephaniah – the Lord is intolerant of other gods!
- Let’s pray that we can **stand firm on this in our day of inclusivism, pluralism, and universalism, and that other churches in the area can as well.**
- Pray for those making the gospel known in places where the Triune God is not worshiped.

Syncretism (1:5)

- “those who worship the host of heaven...” is a form of superstition (Deut 4:19; Jer 44:19)
- It’s also **privatized** rather than corporate, “on one’s rooftop”
- Some worshiped created things rather than Creator God (Rom 1)
- **Milcom**, a pagan deity was also worshiped (a god in Ammon)

Today, you hear:

- “I worship Yahweh and Allah.”
- “I like to get the best from all the traditions”
- Here: “Yahweh is powerful, but you know, there’s Milcom ... there’s Baal”
- But worshiping the God of the Bible and worshiping another God is not true worship at all!

Apathy

- They quit seeking. Their heart was cold. They turned away.
- Today: You don't really pray anymore; you don't delight in Scripture; you don't give offerings. You don't live for God's glory.

Which of these are you more given to?

Idolatry – passionate, all in, sort of person...

- You can get **addicted** to something easily.
- You **fixate** on things.
- **Idol is something you'll sin to get; or you'll sin if you don't get.**
- You have unrealistic expectation of things or people thinking that they will give you ultimate joy and peace and comfort. But they won't.

Syncretism – this is a temptation for the **people pleaser**.

- Don't compromise convictions for money, achievements or to get approval from others.
- Be a person of conviction who says "I can't be bought" and "I won't be bullied." Live before the eyes of God for the glory of Christ, and not for the approval of others.

Apathy

- This is the practical atheist.
- They don't think it will do any good to seek the Lord.
- **They tried once; nothing happened. They've moved on.**
- **Now their interest is in money, or politics, or a hobby.**

The point: Let us seek the Lord alone – for He alone is worthy of our worship.

#2: God is Just in His Judgments (1:7-18)

Now we read of this multi-faced Day of the Lord.

- **The theme runs through the end of the book.**
- **The immediate fulfillment will happen when Babylon sacks Jerusalem.**
- **The far fulfillment comes later.**

Read 7-9 (A day of sacrifice and punishment; a list of evil deeds are given)

- **Be in awe of God (1:7)**
- **Foreign attire – idol worship (1:8)**
- **Leaping over the threshold (a pagan practice of Philistia, 1 Sam 4)**

Read 10-18 (a litany of punishments leveled against Jerusalem and its inhabitants)

17: on all mankind because all have sinned.

- **So God's judgment is just.**
- **One will not be judged for how impressive his/her resume is; or how they climbed the ladder.**
- **The issue is how we have responded to God.**

Application: The Lord is active now, and the Lord will act in the future.

A. He is active now: God is not a “do nothing god” (v. 12)

- Recall Habakkuk 1:5ff.
- Zeph: be silent before him; he’s alive, he’s aware; he’s raising up the Babylonians.
- **Consider the love of God in Christ.**
 - Christ came for us! He loved us when we rebelled against him!
 - He rose from the dead! He is reigning now!
 - We worship a Living Christ.
- **A “do nothing god” is an idol!**

A. Future Action: Judgment is coming; this should cause you to make your life count. (14-18)

- **Do you really believe that such a day is coming?**
- **Most of the people in our day do not believe in the day of the Lord.**
- **This is OT right?** You don’t need to pay attention to this, right?
- **Wrong! Jesus will judge the whole world. (17:31)**
- **But if you are constantly swimming in pop film, culture, and video games, when will you ever stop and ponder this?**
 - **Sitcoms are not going to remind you of final judgment!**
 - **Playing video games for hours will not give you a sense of final judgment.**
- I’m not opposed to film and music and games; what I’m saying is, **final judgment must be on our minds if we are to live wisely and to God’s glory.**

#3: God is Merciful to the Humble (2:1-3)

God gives these warnings so that they may hear it, heed it, and turn to him to avoid judgment.

There’s time to repent. There’s an opportunity for mercy.

1-2: They are a shameless people with no right to be God’s people unless they repent.

3: **Seek the Lord, “all you humble of the land, who do his just commands” implies not everyone was apostate.**

“Perhaps” - he’s not questioning God’s ability or willingness to save the humble; he just doesn’t know who this believing remnant is, so everyone is called to seek the Lord.

- **God will have a people for himself — the prophets continue to emphasize God’s electing grace.** He will be true to his promises.
- God would have a believing remnant in the OT, and he would do a greater work of grace in the new covenant.
- When in exile, Ezekiel would also prophesy of the day in which the Lord would give a new heart to his people. God will do it! He will save! (Ezek 36:26ff)
- **Remnant is mentioned later:**
 - 3:12: “I will leave a meek and humble people among you, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.”

- Some were “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3)
- Another translation is “meek of the earth” for “humble of the land” (Matt 5:5)
- Zephaniah is calling for a heart like Jesus describes in the sermon on the Mount.

Application: This is a mark of true godliness: seeking the Lord in humility and righteousness, as the outflow of the grace he has shown us

- This is reminiscent of **Micah 6:8**
- God wants his people to be marked by humility, righteousness, and earnest seeking of him.

#4: God Will Judge the Nations (2:4-3:8)

Now Zephaniah broadens his scope to include the nations; to those who have been arrogant and had mistreated his people...

Zephaniah pulls in Famous Amos move, where he starts first with the Israel’s neighbors before pointing the finger at Judah for committing the same types of sins.

The people on the coast of Canaan, the Philistines (2:4-7)

- ⁴ For Gaza shall be deserted,
and Ashkelon shall become a desolation;
Ashdod’s people shall be driven out at noon,
and Ekron shall be uprooted.
- ⁵ Woe to you inhabitants of the seacoast,
you nation of the Cherethites!
The word of the LORD is against you,
O Canaan, land of the Philistines;
and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left.
- ⁶ And you, O seacoast, shall be pastures,
with meadows for shepherds
and folds for flocks.
- ⁷ The seacoast shall become the possession
of the **remnant** of the house of Judah, [all will not be gone in Judah; there’s a remnant]
on which they shall graze,
and in the houses of Ashkelon
they shall lie down at evening.
For the LORD their God will be mindful of them [the remnant]
and restore their fortunes.

*These verses about the remnant should also motivate us to **be faithful**.*

- While we may at times feel like we are the only Christian around – at work, in our school, in secular cities, or among unreached people groups – we should remember the words of Zephaniah.
- We should remember how God assured Elijah of a remnant...
- God is at work around the world forming a people for himself, by his grace and for his glory; and it is good to be in that number.
- Be faithful even when it seems like you are alone.
- The majority had fallen away from Yahweh, but God was mindful of the faithful, and he is mindful of you too when you are in a place where there are no believers.

- **Be okay with being different; with being set apart.**
- **That's more important than being cool.**
- Live for God's glory alone.

Next, he addresses the Moabites and Ammonites (2:8-11)

- ⁸ "I have heard the taunts of Moab
and the revilings of the Ammonites,
how they have taunted my people
and made boasts against their territory. [arrogance being called out]
- ⁹ Therefore, as I live," declares the LORD of hosts,
the God of Israel,
"Moab shall become like Sodom,
and the Ammonites like Gomorrah,
a land possessed by nettles and salt pits,
and a waste forever.
The **remnant** of my people shall plunder them,
and the survivors of my nation shall possess them."
- ¹⁰ This shall be their lot in return for their pride,
because they taunted and boasted
against the people of the LORD of hosts.
- ¹¹ The LORD will be **awesome** against them; [awesome describes God – in awe of his power/Ex 15.11]
for he will fash all the gods of the earth,
and to him shall bow down,
each in its place,
all the lands of the nations.

The Cushites lived in Ethiopia (they too will fall)... (2:12)

- ¹² You also, O Cushites, shall be slain by my sword. [They are spoken of positively in 3:10, showing God will judge the nations, but also save some from among the nations]

Even the mighty Assyria will fall (2:13-15) [the major world power prior to Babylon]

- ¹³ And he will stretch out his hand against the north
and destroy Assyria,
and he will make Nineveh a desolation,
a dry waste like the desert.
- ¹⁴ Herds shall lie down in her midst,
all kinds of beasts;
even the owl and the hedgehog
shall lodge in her capitals;
a voice shall hoot in the window;
devastation will be on the threshold;
for her cedar work will be laid bare.
- ¹⁵ This is the exultant city
that lived securely,
that said in her heart,
"I am, and there is no one else."
What a desolation she has become,
a lair for wild beasts!
Everyone who passes by her
hisses and shakes his fist.

**Finally, Jerusalem is addressed again (3:1-7).
She acts like the nations; she will be judged like them.**

Their Sin

3 Woe to her who is **rebellious** and **defiled**,
the **oppressing** city!

2 She **listens to no voice**;
she **accepts no correction**.

She **does not trust in the LORD**;
she **does not draw near to her God**.

- **Being “stubborn” is not just some sort of personality trait that should be minimized. “Oh he’s just stubborn.”** It is rebellion against Almighty God!
- He doesn’t wink at a refusal to learn and be corrected.
- We are to be teachable; to be corrected...

3 Her officials within her
are roaring lions;
her judges are evening wolves
that leave nothing till the morning.

4 Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men;
her priests profane what is holy;
they do violence to the law.

Their Shame

5 The LORD within her is righteous;
he does no injustice;
every morning he shows forth his justice;
each dawn he does not fail;
but the unjust knows no shame.

Their Lack of repentance

6 “I have cut off nations;
their battlements are in ruins;
I have laid waste their streets
so that no one walks in them;
their cities have been made desolate,
without a man, without an inhabitant.

7 I said, ‘Surely you will fear me;
you will accept correction.
Then your dwelling would not be cut off
according to all that I have appointed against you.’
But all the more they were eager
to make all their deeds corrupt.

**After then hearing the nations, one by one being rattled off; the prophet summarizes:
God will judge the whole earth.**

8 “Therefore wait for me,” declares the LORD,
“for the day when I rise up to seize the prey.
For my decision is to gather nations,

to assemble kingdoms,
to pour out upon them my indignation,
all my burning anger;
for in the fire of my jealousy
all the earth shall be consumed.

**God will judge everyone through the man, he has appointed, Christ Jesus (Acts 17:31).
And he has given assurance by raising Christ from the dead!**

That's how Paul ended his message, and some scoffed, and they do today as well.

#5: God is Gracious to His People (3:9-20)

We've read a lot about God as Judge, and now we see **how gracious this God is.**

It is a section filled with **hope.**

While the return from Babylon captivity is foretold, we know that this exalted language points forward to the Messianic age.

Christians are a remnant waiting to be gathered home, with all the redeemed from around the world.

God will gather us; and He will give us a whole new world filled with shalom.

The return of exile wouldn't bring all of Zephaniah's words to pass – we will see that in the post-exilic prophets.

But one day, this grand vision will be a reality.

There are four blessings of grace for God's people:

1. God will have a people for himself from among the nations (3:9-10)

- God will not only judge the nations; but He will also save people from among the nations.
- **God calls distant nations to worship him!**
- **God's choice of Israel did not suggest he didn't love the nations; He chose them to be a blessing to the nations.**
- **Here we see a wonderful message of hope not just for the people of Judah, but for the Gentiles, the nations.**

9: "Pure speech" – they will not call on false gods, but on the name of the Lord.

- It is striking how this language is reflected in Acts 2 at Pentecost.
 - "call upon the name of the Lord"
 - the miracle of speech"
 - "being in one accord" (a reversal of Babel
 - The nations were there at Pentecost

- When we go to the nations we are not saying “Come worship our God” as if he is only the God of America. We are saying, “Worship the God of the nations”
- God is the God of Ghana as much as he is of Raleigh
- God is the God of Lithuania as much as Durham.
- This is why we support our missionaries, IMB, Acts 29.
- This is why your regularly giving matters; why your prayers matter; why advocacy teams matter; why you should consider going. This is the very heart of God.

2. God will remove the shame from his people (11-13; 18-20)

11-13: This happened partially at the return of Babylon, but is a preview of something greater.

- The principle is: **Get humble now so that you are not humiliated later.**
- You may be humiliated in this life for your faith.
- But on that final day, there will be no shame.
- There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

18-20: God’s people will be vindicated and praised

- The **mention of the lame and outcast also references to the Messiah’s work.**

3. God’s salvation produces great joy in his people (3:14-15)

- Joy! (14)
- No enemies (15)
- No fear (15b)
- Why? Because **verse 15**, Messianic promise: *the king will be in your midst!*

Luke 17:21

²⁰ Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, ²¹ nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ *for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.*”

14: This is a **command of emotion** – exult with all your heart!

- We all have different temperaments, but that has to be expressed in you!
- **Because the Messiah has come, we should exult!**
- **We have something better than the Exodus and the Second Exodus (Return from Babylonian captivity); we have been delivered from the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God’s believe Son.**

4. God’s love astonishes and comforts his people (3:16-17)

16: When afraid you grow weak.

- But when the Lord is in your mist, this won’t happen.

Then we read of our powerful God’s love for us... It is amazing..

3:17: *The power of God. “A mighty one” – a warrior*

- Unlike human rulers, he does not lose heart.
- He does not lose.
- He is mighty to save!

- (Illustration: singing this, praying for my dad)

3:17b: *The love of God*

1. *Rejoicing over you with gladness*

- If you are in Christ, the Father takes delight in you.
- “With gladness”
- Like a husband over his bride;
- Like a father over his child
- Like a warrior over his victory.

2. *Quieting you with his love*

- His love, his presence brings comfort.
- He gives you confidence. (Eph 3:14-21)

3. *Exulting over you with singing*

- In verse 14, we sing.
- In verse 17, God sings.
- **What does he sing? What does it sound like? I don't know. It's fun to think about.**
- It reminds you of Luke 15 – The Father who threw a party!

Brothers and sisters, do we believe this? Why don't you believe it?

Six Possible Reasons that this text addresses:

1. **Too guilty?** He has taken away our judgments (Rom 8:1); we have no fear of future wrath.
2. **Too afraid?** He is with us; and there's coming day where fear won't exist (3:15; 16)
3. **Too many enemies?** He has cleared our ultimate ones; He is mighty to save! (3:15)
4. **Too distant?** He is in our midst! (3:15; 17)
5. **Too weak?** he won't let our hands grow weak (3:16)
6. **Too hurt?** He will gather us up, bind up our wounds, and turn our shame to praise (3:19)

He rejoices over his beloved!

You are not just secure; you are being sung over!

Conclusion

Don't be complacent toward this God!

He is not a do nothing god!

- He is not a stoic, God.
- HE is passionate!!
- In Zephaniah, he **burns with anger** toward the wicked, the rebellious, and **he sings LOUDLY** over his people.

Dear Saint, He loves you wholeheartedly.

- Believe it.

- He delights in you because you are his.
- He loves you because you are in his Son, in whom he is well pleased.
- **For all who call on the name of Jesus Christ, you are his treasured possession; his bride, his child; he delights to sing over you with joy.**
- Remember this, when you are in that ICU room; during your sleepless night; when you are lonely, perplexed and afflicted.

These promises were meant to inspire faithfulness and perseverance in light of trials to come, the same way the book of Revelation is to inspire suffering Christians to persevere.

You can endure when you know God is singing over you and this future awaits you!

Whatever you are going through today, let these promises comfort you and motivate you to endure:

- God is saving a people from among the nations
- God will remove the shame and vindicate his people
- God is the giver of great joy; He is in our midst
- Our God is singing over us!

He is with us; He has come for us; He by the Spirit is in us;

He is singing over us; and He will take us to be with Him forever, in a place with no sin and no shame, and no tears.

Do you want to be part of this people? Do you want these promises to be yours?

Then turn from sin and **seek the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Christian friend, if your passions have cooled, then I pray this vision of God's grace toward you would renew your passion to seek Him – in his word, in prayer, with God's people, in your life.