

Pastor Nathan Schultz
Upper Thames Missionary Church
Advent 3 2021

Ancient Words of *Joy*
Zephaniah 3:14-20

JOY

"amnesia"? - is defined as "A condition characterized by the inability of a person to recall facts or previous experiences."

"Cultural amnesia" - a condition characterized by a whole society's inability to recall facts or previous experiences.

C.S. Lewis - "chronological snobbery". This is what happens when the logic of our consumer age poisons our thinking. Just like the iPhone 13 is better than the 7 or pathetic 4. So our ideas are better than the 1900s 1500s or 1000BC purely because they are newer they must be better

Why would I start a sermon about Joy during Advent this way?

Because we need to be challenged to study and trust these words from God in Holy Scripture. If we read them as inspirational quotes rather than GOD'S INSPIRED WORD, then we won't open ourselves up to be transformed by them. We hang inspirational quote behind glass on our walls... But GOD PLANTS his INSPIRED WORD like a seed in our hearts.

-Zephaniah proclaimed these words 2625 years ago (give or take a few). Through him, the Holy Spirit proclaimed a message of God's Judgement on those who reject him and God's blessing on those who obey Him.

Zephaniah spoke to a culture that had a kind of cultural amnesia as well - they had forgotten YHVH, their God.

After diving deep into the pitfalls of Israel's disobedience, Zephaniah resurfaces to proclaim that there is still hope - even abundant and **joyful** hope.

"Sing aloud... Shout... Rejoice... Exult!"

Why? – Salvation!

There are two sides of the coin of salvation in our passage today:

1. To be saved from the consequences we earn through disobedience
2. To be saved from our enemies – specifically – the enemy of your soul – the Devil.

"The judgement has been taken away" it says in v. 15

"Your enemies are gone".

This **is full salvation** - from both the personal guilt and the opposition of the Accuser.

Like a fugitive on the run desires both removal of guilt and victory over the prosecutor – God has given us fugitives salvation on both fronts!

The response to total salvation, on the outside and the inside is complete **JOY**.

You might know the lyrics to the hymn All to Jesus - "O the Joy of full salvation, glory, glory to His Name"

- the Holy Spirit leads Zephaniah to proclaim a day of **Great Joy** in v. 14. A day that begins in earnest when Christ came to us - the first advent.

- It is spoken of as past and present salvation in Verses 14 and 15 because it is assured – remember this is a prophetic word, God's saying the outcome is guaranteed. But its not a present reality yet. In fact in about 40 years Judah will be overrun and the Kingdom will be taken off into exile. Sometimes we have to wait, and wait.

-**Joy** is like a seed planted deep in the dark ground – what looks dead and impossible is there and will absolutely burst into something new.

Happiness, you have often heard, is a momentary feeling based on circumstances. I agree. Joy doesn't just go deeper, Joy is entirely different.

Happiness is a reaction, as insubstantial as the air around you, if the circumstances change, like a little breeze, happiness can be carried away.

Let me put it this way:

Happiness is circumstantial - joy is ontological.

Circumstantial means the events going on around you. Ontological means your very "being" – who you are – Joy is rooted in the New You that Christ is forming.

- in Christ in you - as the Apostle Paul puts it - the hope of Glory to come (Col 1:27).

That's why Joy is possible in the midst of trial - because it doesn't grow from circumstance but from your very being. – the new creation that you are in Christ.

This is important for us to notice – because things like the so called “prosperity Gospel twist and distort the real good news:

Joy doesn't grow as God changes your circumstances; it grows at He changes YOU.

Israel's circumstances got WORSE after Zephaniah's life

Who rejoices in our passage today? (v. 14?)

The People who belong to God on that great day of the Lord. The people who are saved from their enemies and freed from their punishments.

-but it is only when **Christ appears** that we see that this "Day of the Lord" has come.

-In other words, its us – the people who belong to God through Christ will rejoice

But I ask again... Who rejoices in our passage? (v. 17?)

He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will quiet your heart by his love, he will exult over you with loud singing.”

The Lord himself - he rejoices in that day. God is not aloof and distant – he is over the moon (no pun intended) when people return to Him!

- important echoes of these words in the New Testament:

In John 15:11 we see that Jesus says to His disciples - "I have told you this so that my JOY may be in you and your JOY may be complete." and also in Hebrews 12:2 - "for the JOY set before him he endured the cross"

– our rejoicing and his rejoicing are also tied to this promise that is repeated twice - "the LORD your God is in your midst"

Again, this is fully realized only on the Day Christ appeared as a humble baby. John 1:14 makes this clear. The Word became flesh and DWELT among us.”

It is only when God comes to Dwell among us in Christ that these promises are realized.

It is only with the coming of Christ that this JOY in Zephaniah bursts into full bloom.

-I’m going to close today by summarizing the words of Zephaniah in light of Christ:

In CHRIST God HAS taken away our judgements and cleared away our enemies. (Zeph 3:15)

In Christ God IS in our midst (Zeph 3:15&17)

And In Christ God WILL rejoice, and gather, and save and change and make and restore us." (Zeph 17-20)

Joy comes from all three.