

**“A Call for the Nation”** (Zephaniah 1:14–2:3)(6.21.20)

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

It is very likely that you have never heard a sermon from Zephaniah. Some consider him the most minor of the Minor Prophets. There are only three chapters, but they are a powerful warning. They are difficult to hear, more difficult to preach, and even more difficult to respond to appropriately. In some churches, the preacher might get chased from the pulpit for sharing the truths of Zephaniah.

W.C. Kaiser writes, “The temptation for modern readers is to tone down the harshness and horror of the judgment threatened in this text by juxtaposing against it the marvelous grace and mercy of our Lord.

But their efforts cannot shield us from the seriousness or the certainty of these pronouncements for the future. An insipid view of the love of God should not obliterate an appreciation for the vigor of the wrath of God against all unrighteousness and ungodliness. In fact, Jesus alludes to Zephaniah 1:2–3 in his parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:41 where he says, “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will *gather out* of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness.””

I came very close to reading the whole book of Zephaniah to you while only adding a couple of editorial remarks. This week, I encourage you to read it all for yourself, especially if you think what I share is too harsh. Hear now, the word of God.

Zephaniah 1:14–2:3 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> The great day of the Lord is near,  
near and hastening fast;  
the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter;  
the mighty man cries aloud there.

<sup>15</sup> A day of wrath is that day,  
a day of distress and anguish,  
a day of ruin and devastation,  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness,  
<sup>16</sup> a day of trumpet blast and battle cry  
against the fortified cities

and against the lofty battlements.  
<sup>17</sup> I will bring distress on mankind,  
so that they shall walk like the blind,  
because they have sinned against the Lord;  
their blood shall be poured out like dust,  
and their flesh like dung.

<sup>18</sup> Neither their silver nor their gold  
shall be able to deliver them  
on the day of the wrath of the Lord.

In the fire of his jealousy,  
all the earth shall be consumed;  
for a full and sudden end  
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

**2** Gather together, yes, gather,  
O shameless nation,

<sup>2</sup> before the decree takes effect  
—before the day passes away like chaff—  
before there comes upon you  
the burning anger of the Lord,

before there comes upon you  
the day of the anger of the Lord.  
<sup>3</sup> 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.

### **The word of God for the people of God.**

BODY:

While I titled this “A Call to the Nation,” the idea is not some kind of abstraction. The call to humility, righteousness, and seeking God, is not rhetorical or for “the other guy.” This command of God is for princes, for mighty men, for merchants, for warriors, for pagans and idolatrous priests. The call is for those that do not follow the LORD nor seek the LORD, nor inquire of the LORD. This proclamation is for all the inhabitants of the earth.

While we look at this in more detail, I want you to use an additional verse as a filter for your feelings, for what you hear and how you respond. Psalm 147:11 (ESV) but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Even though fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, even though God’s word emphasizes fear of God, WE DO NOT FEAR GOD. The word fear has been sanitized to ONLY mean revere God, but surely you have heard the term healthy fear. You and I have been taught a flattened faith that depicts a portrait of God instead of a full bodied sculpture of the Holy, Holy, Holy, God Almighty.

Maybe, you are thinking I overstate the case. Maybe, you are thinking that this can only be that old fashioned Hebrew Testament God; not the God of the New Testament; not the God who sent Jesus.

Paul warns about The Day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 (ESV):

**5** Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. **2** For you yourselves are fully aware that **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief in the night.

**3** While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” **then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.** **4** But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. **5** For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. **6** So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. **9** For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

For our Tuesday night Bible study, we have been wrestling with 1 John. The Apostle John wrote it to Christians so that those who believe in the name of the Son of God may know that they have eternal life. So far, in the first two chapters there have been a couple major themes. We are to humbly confess our sins and we are promised forgiveness and being made righteous by God. We are to love God, agape God, and love people, agape people. John gives no middle ground: not loving is hating. Surely you can see an application for today.

Earl Palmer, in his commentary on 1 John chapter 2, says that we become what we do. We Become What We Do. When we take deliberate action to love, we become loving. When we act with hate and malice, we become hateful and malicious.

To apply that concept to Zephaniah, chapter 2, we are told to seek and inquire of God; to seek righteousness; to seek after humility. So, what does that look like? How do we become seekers of God, righteousness and humility?

To seek righteousness is to strive to meet God's standard of behavior. Not your standard. Not the culture's standard. Jesus says that if we love Him we will obey Him. Do you love God enough to trust that the LORD knows better than you do? That the Lord has your best interest at heart? Do not think that the LORD wants robotic response. The author of Hebrews tells us that without faith, it is impossible to please God.

James warns us in James 4:4 (ESV) You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Jesus called his disciples his friends.

So, to be righteous, we must remain faithful. To seek righteousness is to DO and to BE what is right and pleasing to the LORD. Where do we find details about how to be righteous? Our New International Version has 311 passages about righteousness to instruct us. The Lexham Bible Dictionary gives this technical definition: Understanding righteousness in the Christian world involves situating the language in the coordinates of **salvation in Christ and the ethical imperatives** that this creates for believers. How do we DO humility to BE humble? Humility is gentleness; it is meekness. Humility is NOT being prideful or arrogant. In our New International Version, there are hundreds of verses about pride and humility. Easton's Bible Dictionary starts by describing humility as a prominent Christian grace. It is a state of mind well pleasing to God. It preserves the soul in tranquility and makes us patient under trials. We have the perfect example in our perfect Savior. Philippians 2:6-8 (NIV84)

<sup>6</sup> Who [Jesus], being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

The entry in Easton's Bible Dictionary closes with this observation, "It is a great paradox in Christianity that it makes humility the avenue to glory."

My friends, there is something pernicious about pride and arrogance. It is natural for us not to want others to take advantage of us. We want to win the argument. Why can't THEY see that we are RIGHT? It is natural to assert our wants and desires, our benefits, over those of other people. Pride and arrogance can start subtly and slip into our mindset. It is not a far jump to start thinking we are superior, we are better than others.

There are other ways that pride and arrogance are manifested: When we are self-willed instead of seeking God's will for our lives. When we make decisions independent of God. When we hold others to standards that we do not uphold. When we begin to think of ourselves as anything but stewards of what God has blessed us with. When we reject the Lord's chastisement and correction. All those, and more, come from pride and arrogance.

God speaks in 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV84) — if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. There are several passages with these themes.

I would not be surprised if you think I am being overly dramatic. You may think that Zephaniah is outdated and have some doubts about its veracity. After all, it has been over 2,500 years and the day of God's wrath has yet to become a reality. Well, there have been foothills of destruction that are leading to the mountain of the great day of the LORD. Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple were destroyed in a horrific way by Roman armies.

There are other reasons for the delay. Peter tells us 2 Peter 3:8–9 (NIV84) <sup>8</sup> But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Zephaniah pleads urgently. I plead urgently. The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast. It will come when we least expect it. When it starts, there will be no turning it aside. All the earth and all the inhabitants will be consumed, will come to a full and sudden end. Respond now before it is too late. Now. Maybe I should have titled this message BEFORE, before it is too late.

Perhaps... It may be... If you follow the LORD's just commands. If you pursue wholeheartedly humility and righteousness. If you pursue God wholeheartedly. Your sovereign Savior may hide you from the burning fierceness of His anger. You may be protected.

Are we not a shameless nation? Have we not as a people fallen into idolatry and godlessness? We too have made child sacrifices to Molech. Our politicians tell us that we might as well legalize everything so that we can tax it. We have a form of religion without the power and holiness of God.

It is time for us to gather, to assemble, to come together. We must call out to God and confess our sins. We must confess as individuals. We must confess as the wayward Bride of Christ, the Church. We must confess as a shameless nation. As government leaders, as prophets of God, as the faithful remnant, as disciples of Jesus, we need to unite our voices in prayerful confession; to repent of our shallowness and shortcomings.

O God, You are my God;

Earnestly I seek You;

My soul thirsts for You;

My body longs for You,

In a dry and weary land

Where there is no water. ([Psalm 63:1](#))

The Apostle Peter declares ([2 Peter 3:10–14](#)), ""Since the day of the Lord will come like a thief, what kind of person should I be in holy conduct and godliness as I look for and hasten the coming of the day of God? But according to His promise, I am looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, since I am looking for these things, may I be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless."''

CONCLUSION:

There is an ancient hymn, about 800 years old. For four hundred years, it was a regular part of the Catholic Book of Worship, which is called the Roman Missal. It was removed in 1969.

The title is "*Dies Irae*" (*D-ez Ear-I*) in translation from Latin, it reads:

Day of wrath! O day of mourning!

See fulfilled the prophets' warning,

Heav'n and earth in ashes burning!

O what fear man's bosom rendeth

When from heav'n the Judge descendeth

On whose sentence all dependeth!

Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth;

Through earth's sepulchers it ringeth;

All before the throne it bringeth.

Death is struck, and nature quaking,

All creation is awaking,

To its Judge an answer making.

There is no time to waste, the day of the LORD is at hand. Take very seriously the call to seek righteousness, to seek humility, to seek and inquire of the LORD. For those that respond with a living

and abiding faith in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, He who will come again to judge the living and the dead, there is a great promise.

Jesus promises in John 6:39 (NIV84), "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day."

Paul says in Romans 11:5 (ESV) So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

We become what we do. Seek the Lord, seek righteousness, and seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the arms of the Almighty.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.