

God Delights, Quiets, Rejoices, and Sings

3rd Sun. in Advent – 12/15/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Zephaniah 3:14-20 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 17, **“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.”**

Introduction

✘ A *Pew Research* survey in 2022 showed that 39% of adults in the U.S. believe that “we are living in the end times” (<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/08/about-four-in-ten-u-s-adults-believe-humanity-is-living-in-the-end-times/>). That’s about 130 million people, or 4 out of every 10 of your friends and neighbors. Former U.S. congressman, Tom Delay, used to display a wood carving in his office that read, “This could be the day” (*Newsweek*, Nov. 1, 1999, p 70).

→ While many extremists try to actually control God and make the Last Day come sooner by creating religious, ethnic, or class violence, some people declare the end times as an opportunity to minister to people who are spiritually lost. Scores of others are totally confused about whether or not they will have the power to heal the sick and speak to the dead, or will they experience a period of madness, darkness, and terror because Jesus “already returned” but then left them behind?

✘ But folks, because you and I are not God, the truth is that how we live out this day and how we approach our end time depends entirely on God’s relationship with us. He’s the one that manages the calendar. And we see that especially here in the season of Advent, as we recount the ways that God worked throughout His Old Testament history to proclaim, prophesy and prepare people for the perfectly timed appearance of His Son, Jesus in the human flesh of a tiny infant on the first Christmas. As verse 15 said it would happen, that was the day when our God, Yahweh, came as our King to live here, “in our midst.”

→ Yes, the Old Testament text that we consider today is a part of God’s historical work in bringing His Son to us and the entire world so that we should have no fear or trepidation regarding the end times or the Last Day.

→ Zephaniah, who lived some 625 years before Christ was born, helps to unwrap God’s truth about Jesus, providing us with God’s words of comfort and hope. He assures us that, because of Jesus, God delights in us, quiets us, and rejoices and sings over us as His people.

I. God Quiets Us

✘ The first of those is found early in the book of Zephaniah, in chapter 1:7, where the people are commanded, “Be silent before Yahweh God, for the day of Yahweh is near.” How many of you remember the old investment company TV commercial that said, “When EF Hutton talks, people listen!”

→ Well, this is God, not only telling the people in Zephaniah’s day, but of every day, that when He speaks through His prophetic Word, it’s time for us to stop whatever it is that we’re doing; stop our own self-centered chatter and put aside all of the voices around us that are trying to get us to listen to, and follow them, and listen carefully now to what God has to tell us.

→ And why is this so important? because, “the day of Yahweh is near.” For the people of Israel, this is God’s way of saying, “Y’all better straighten up and pay attention, because your judgment is just around the corner.”

✘ You see, Judah’s officials, as well as the people, had become more concerned about fitting in with their pagan neighbors; about adopting their culture and clothing, but most concerning, about following their false gods and superstitions, as well as treating others with violence and

deceit – more concerned about those things than they were about God and His ways and His truths.

→ But before we get all high and mighty and think, “How could they do such things?” folks, we need to honestly compare our own ways to God’s Word as well. Yes, we too, often act as if God’s place in our lives is only to be on the sidelines. We ignore His words of judgment regarding our failure to worship Him alone. We also say, just as the people in Zephaniah 1:12 tried to say, “Yahweh will not do either good or bad.”

→ In other words, just like so many of us and those around us today, they didn’t really believe that God is actually in our midst and actively working in our lives, especially when it comes to Him responding to those things we choose to do that He clearly says we should not.

⊗ This is where those people and we are sorely mistaken. God is omnipresent, and Hebrews 4:13 says, “No creature is hidden from [God’s] sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

→ In verse eight, before our text, God tells His people to be quiet, pay attention and “wait for Me”, that is stay close to Me in obedience and faith, “For My decision is to gather nations...to pour out upon them My indignation, all My burning anger; for in the fire of My jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.”

→ You see, God, in His holiness and love cannot, and will not stand by and just do nothing when people push Him aside for other gods, preferences, priorities or desires. So, it is time for us to be quiet in awe and respect for the one and only true God.

II. God Delights in Us.

⊗ And why? because, in spite of our wayward sinful attitudes, words and actions, God still delights deeply in all of us as His creation. He wants nothing more than for us to be with Him today and always. This is why Zephaniah tells the people in chapter 2:3, “Seek Yahweh, all you humble of the land, who do His just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of Yahweh’s anger.”

→ That there is God’s call to the people of Israel to repent. The only way for them to be delivered from His condemning wrath against their sin was for them to be sheltered in His forgiveness. Isaiah had already taught the people to say, “I will give thanks to you, O Yahweh, for though You were angry with me, Your anger turned away, that You might comfort me” (Isa. 12:1).

→ That’s exactly what verse 15 in this text today tells us, “Yahweh has taken away the judgments against you; He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, Yahweh, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil.”

⊗ But how could this be? Why would God just take away the judgment that we all deserve? No judge with integrity would ever do such a thing. It would not be just or right.

→ Yet in Psalm 7:11 King David declares, “God is a righteous judge.” So for that to be true, then every sin ever committed by those in the Old Testament and you and me here in the New Testament era must be punished. If not, then all of God’s credibility would be lost.

⊗ At the same time though, verse 17 says that God “will exult over you”. Now, to “exult” is to lift up, and because He delights in us, He Himself lifts you and me “up from the pit of destruction”, David says in Psalm 40:2, “and sets [our] feet upon a rock.”

→ That “Rock” is God’s answer to our forgiveness. That “Rock” is His Son, Jesus, whom He sent through the miracle of a virgin birth at Christmas to be Immanuel, which means “God with us.” Jesus is, as verse 15 says, “The King of Israel, Yahweh, in [our] midst.” As the second

person in the Holy Trinity, Jesus' delight and love for us, is so deep that He willingly took His Father's wrath and punishment for our sin upon Himself when He hung and died on the cross.

III. God Rejoices Over Us.

✘ This is why and how Zephaniah can rightly say in verse 17 that God "will rejoice over you with gladness" because those whom He has created and so desired to have with Him since the very first day, actually are able to be with Him, by the gracious sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

→ In Isaiah 62:5 we are told, "...as the bridegroom rejoice over the bride, so shall your God rejoices over you." Though we do not deserve to be God's one true love, all who turn from their sin in repentance and faith; all who wholeheartedly believe that this baby in the manger in Bethlehem actually is God in our midst, and God on the cross to shed His blood and cover our guilt, and God, dead and buried in the tomb to pay for our sin, and God triumphantly raised in victory over death, and God ascended and sitting now on the throne at the Father's right hand in heaven; all of us who have that faith given to us at our baptism and alive within us here and now today ... we are His "bride," as Scripture says, adorned in the robe of Christ, our Bridegroom's righteousness today and forevermore.

IV. God Sings Loudly For Us and With Us.

✘ Yes, "God rejoices over you (and me) with gladness." He "exults" over [us] and as verse 17 concludes, He does so with "loud singing." Now remember this text begins in verse 14, telling God's people that they/we are to "sing aloud", "shout", "rejoice and exult with all the heart."

→ You see, God wants us to join in with Him in the joyful noise! After all, there is a great deal for us all to celebrate, isn't there?

✘ I mean, the LORD had a multitude of reasons to punish the people that Zephaniah was preaching to. And yet, instead of sending the fire of His wrath against them for their sin, what did He do? He told Zephaniah to announce that, in His mercy, He was dropping the charges against them.

→ This is God's love, mercy, justice and wisdom at its best! This is how His perfect justice is maintained. Sin is still punished and shown to be the serious offense that it is. Man's utter inability to save ourselves or earn God's favor remains impossible, just as it has always been. And God, the Creator and Redeemer of all, is still the One in charge just as He must be. He is the only one capable of delivering those whom He loves from His very own righteous anger.

→ No longer do the people need to fear God, because, as verse 19 says, He "changes their shame into praise and renown in all the earth." God's the one that gets all the praise because God's the one who has done all the work in saving them and us.

✘ Once we know this from His prophet Zephaniah and the rest of Scripture, how can we, my friends, help but "sing aloud", "shout", "rejoice and exult with all the heart" (v.14). After all, in Jesus, the reason why God quieted us before, that is the depth of our sin that shamed and humbled us before our Judge; that has now been "taken away" by that same Judge, because of His extreme, undeserved love for us!

Conclusion

✘ And as we see here today, this truth brings God just as much delight, exulting and loud musical joy as it does for us.

→ Jesus gave us a great picture of His, the Father's and the Holy Spirit's joy in our salvation in His parable of the one lost sheep. After describing the great effort and sacrifice that the Shepherd was willing to endure because of His great love for that one sheep that had become lost, Jesus tells us that once He found and saved that sheep, He not only rejoiced Himself, but He called together his friends and neighbors and He said, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my

sheep that was lost.” And then Jesus revealed the truth of this parable – that He, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, as well as everyone else in heaven joins in with the celebration. “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Lk. 15:7).

- ✘ What a comfort and joy, knowing that God delights over His gift of our eternal life with Him; that in Jesus’ forgiveness He quiets our consciences; He rejoices over our redemption; and He sings the songs of our salvation. To Him be all the glory! Amen.