



8/30/24

One of the things I often ask myself when I read scripture, especially about the character of God, is "Do I believe this?" There's what we say we believe and could answer correctly on a quiz...and there's what we functionally believe. What we truly believe will always be carried out in our actions. So...do my actions reveal that I truly believe what it says, or do they reveal something else? These questions are never to shame us, but to help us look at our hearts to see if there's something we need the Lord to change in us. If I'm being honest, I have to admit that sometimes my answer is no...I don't believe it. And when my answer is no, I ask the Lord to change my heart...because I know that if I don't believe it, it's not God who's wrong, but me. God is so gracious. He will change our hearts if we let Him. As I look at today's passage, my prayer is that we will genuinely, functionally believe what it says about our Lord...and ask Him to change our hearts where we don't.

*Blessings,
Jonna*

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Zephaniah was one of the "minor prophets" in the Bible, meaning that his book of prophecy was small...just a few chapters compared to a major prophet like Isaiah who wrote a 66 chapter book. Zephaniah's prophecy was directed to the people of Judah (the Israelite tribes that had split off from the other tribes of Israel). They had gotten into serious idolatry used to justify things like sacrificing babies. God loved His people...and even in their rebellion, He wanted to call them back to Himself. But repentance doesn't come until a person recognizes his need for forgiveness. That usually doesn't come without facing the consequences of the rebellion.

Zephaniah wrote his book to warn Judah of the consequences they were going to face for their sin...but God never gives warning without also giving hope. This passage in the 3rd chapter is a message of hope. Though God would allow their enemies to pursue them and hurt them because of their rebellion, He would bring that to an end. He will ultimately bring all the suffering to an end when Jesus returns and reigns supreme. This passage is about what will take place "on that day" when Jesus puts an end to Satan's reign.

Vs. 14-15 ~ *"Sing aloud...shout...rejoice...exult with all your heart."* Why? *"The Lord has taken away the judgments against you."* What judgments? From whom? The judgments from HIM. It really doesn't matter who else judges me. The only judgment that matters for my soul is God's judgment. For Him to take away His judgment means that He has forgiven me of all my rebellion as He forgave them. Colossians 3:13-14 says that I had no hope...We were dead in our sin... *"but God made us alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, by nailing it to the cross."* Rejoice! Celebrate. God has removed the wrath we deserve.

He has also cleared away our enemies. I suffer from the consequences of my sin...and I suffer from the attacks because of my enemies' sin against me. And God takes those enemies away. I can't stop them, but He can.

The King of Israel (and of my heart), the Lord Yahweh, is in my midst. Why does that matter? Because no enemy is afraid of me. But they are definitely afraid of Him. Knowing that God is with me means that I have no reason to fear...because I am completely safe with Him.

That will be true in every way someday...and it is true for my soul today. The Lord is so much in my midst that I have the Holy Spirit dwelling within me! No matter what circumstances I face in this broken world, I never face them alone and nothing I face can destroy my soul. O Lord, if I understand how huge that is, I will not be able to help but rejoice and celebrate and exult in You with my whole heart. Open my eyes to see beyond what my physical eyes can see.

Vs. 17 ~ *This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. I used to pray that the Lord would help me grasp its truth for myself AND ALSO help me to be this for my kids. And now I pray He will help me to be this for my grandkids as well.*

"The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save." I am secure in Him because He's with me. He's powerful AND loving. He doesn't flaunt His power to make me feel weak and crushed. He encourages me with His power so that I know that He loves me so much He WILL save me...for eternity AND for the battles I face every single day. Psalm 62:11-12 says, "Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and that to You, O Lord, belongs steadfast love." If God only had power but no love, I would be terrified because He would just use it to crush me (as Satan wants to do). If God had love but no power, I would appreciate that He loved me, but it would mean nothing for my protection because He wouldn't be able to save me. But He is the perfection of both love and power...and so the fact that He's with me can give me security and hope. No one can stand against the living God who hides me in the shelter of His wings.

In His love and in His power, "He will rejoice over you with gladness." With joy. With pleasure. God takes pleasure in His people. When He describes His glory, He does not describe Himself as an angry God. He does not set out to shame us. He rejoices over us. I love that it says He rejoices over us with gladness...joy. He didn't need to say, "with gladness or joy." It's already there in the

word "rejoice." But He wants to stress how much He rejoices over us by saying it twice!

In His love and in His power, "He will quiet you by His love." He does not quiet us by His anger, but by His gentle love...even when we have failed Him so miserably. He doesn't hold a grudge against us. He calms our hearts with His love.

In His love and in His power, "He will exult over you with loud singing." Vs. 14 called us to exult in Him...but He first exults in us! How can that be??? And with loud singing. I can't wait to hear Him sing!!! The one who has given so many beautiful songs and sounds and voices must have the most incredible voice of all...and He sings over me!!! Wow!

What would happen if I truly believed this with all my heart??? O Lord, please make it so!!! This is why I wanted so desperately for the Lord to make me like Him in this verse...so that my kids would never question this truth about me...and I would be able to tell them that it came from the one who loves them even more than I do. I still pray that I, like Him, will greatly delight in my kids, that I will always bring peace to their lives in love, and that I will sing songs of celebration over them even as I pray for them...that I will have the heart of God.

Vs. 18-20 ~ God speaks of what will happen "at that time" when Jesus will return and reign in perfection.

- He will gather those who mourn for the festival. Why would they be mourning? Because they were suffering reproach. It brought shame on them that they couldn't celebrate the festivals that God had put in place but were gone because of their rebellion. God never says, "You made your bed. Now lie in it." He says, "Return to Me and I will restore you."
- He will deal with your oppressors. They will face the consequences of their evil actions.
- He will save the lame and gather the outcast...those who feel like they don't belong...like they're not truly wanted...who have wondered if His word is true for everyone else BUT them. We will wonder no longer. He will gather us to Himself.
- He will change the shame of the unwanted to praise. They will see His restoration come and they will praise Him. 1 Peter 2:10 is true for all who follow Him... "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." He doesn't just gather us to be around Him. He gathers us as HIS children, HIS people.
- He will bring us to Himself and restore us completely.

If I'm not experiencing all of that in all its fullness, I can KNOW that I am in the middle of my story. The end is victory forever. Guaranteed. I deserve none of this promised blessing, but I receive all of it.

This life on earth is just a vapor, a breath. The suffering I face today, whether it be because of my own sin or the sin of others that washes up on my shore, is temporary suffering. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). O Lord, please help me to rest in knowing that You are here with

me now in this broken world, and You will sustain me through it. But help me to put all my joy and hope in my confidence that You won't stop there. You will gather me to You and take away all my shame. You will never leave me as an outsider or second best. Someday I get to hear You sing over me. I can't wait. I absolutely know that on the day I hear Your voice singing, I will not look back at any of my suffering and accuse You for not loving me. I will see You in all Your glory, in the beauty of Your love...and I will rejoice in You with all my heart. Please help me to live with that confidence here and now.