

A HUMBLER PEOPLE

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God saves and restores all those who repent and turn to Him in faith.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Zephaniah

+ SETTING:

The prophet Zephaniah brought one major message to God's people: the day of the Lord was coming. That day was a day of judgment, but it was also a day of grace. God's people and the nations were faced with the reality of God's coming judgment, and Zephaniah's message called all people to repentance to find grace in the face of judgment. The Lord is patient, but His judgment does not delay. It comes soon, so the prophet's call was timely and urgent: Humbly come under the refuge of God's grace or be destroyed in your pride.

DAY 1

READ:

Zephaniah 1:1–2:3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Zephaniah 2:1-3

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The beginning of true nobility comes when a man ceases to be interested in the judgment of men, and becomes interested in the judgment of God."¹

-J. Gresham Machen
(1881-1937)

The day of the Lord is mentioned over and over by the Old Testament prophets. The phrase refers to a day when God comes down in judgment upon the world. It is a phrase synonymous with the day of the Lord's anger, as referred to in Zephaniah 2:2-3. When God comes down in judgment, He will come with burning, consuming anger, an anger that overtakes. His holiness will burn up all the unholiness in the land and purify the world of all evil.

But this day of the Lord has another side. There is also grace. God will not destroy the humble. He will save them. He will patiently and lovingly and kindly rescue those who look to Him alone for salvation. The day of the Lord is both a day to fear and a day to anticipate, depending on where you stand in your relationship with God.

Whereas we might have a tendency to focus on one aspect or the other—judgment or grace—Zephaniah weds these two messages together in one short book. The consuming fire of the Lord's anger is the springboard to appeal to God's people and the nations to seek His face and find grace.

When God comes, all will be exposed. Every hidden thing will come to light. All sin will be uncovered, and the Lord's burning anger will consume it and destroy it finally and fully. He will judge sin and sinner alike.

There is only one escape from this judgment. It is to humble yourself before God and seek His face. Though sin will be uncovered in that great day, those who humble themselves and ask for God's grace and salvation will find in their greatest time of need a covering that can only come from the Lord. Rather than expose their sin to burn them with His overtaking anger, He will show how those sins were covered by Jesus on the cross, who died as the substitute and now stands as the Savior (Col. 2:13-14).

How do you need to humble yourself and seek the Lord's grace? It is not too late to do so.

DAY 2

READ:

Zephaniah 2:4–3:13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Zephaniah 3:9-10

NOTES

Our culture seems enthralled by Armageddon. I don't mean the movie from the 90s, as undeniably good as it was. I'm talking about the end of the world theme that runs through so many books, movies, and TV shows of our day. What will the end be like? We seem to understand, and even wholeheartedly accept, that it will be a time of trouble and to some degree a time of judgment. It always ends in embers, doesn't it? Those who remain struggle to survive.

Does the Bible support such a view of the end? We've seen from our studies that God's judgment is very real and certainly coming to this world. But then what? Embers? Zombies? A long, drawn out, survival-of-the-fittest apocalypse? No. God's judgment will be swift. Then for those who remain with God, the Bible's place of emphasis is restoration.

Those walking the new earth after God's judgment comes are those whom He brings through the cleansing blood of Jesus. He restores His people and places them back in a purified world to live the life they always longed for. Jesus is there in His glory, walking the earth with them. The world is as it was meant to be. No more pain. No more sorrow. No more sadness. All worshipping God.

The biblical theme of restoration runs through the Bible's pages from Genesis to Revelation. It is the constant refrain of God's Word, infusing hope into God's people throughout the ages. Life may look dim right now, and the near future may look darker still. But there is a light shining in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. Jesus is coming with the place He has prepared for His people. Eden—something better than Eden, actually—will come down from heaven, and all God's people will enjoy Him and one another in a renewed and restored world forever (Rev. 21). All who remain will see what a truly wonderful world it is!

How should the Bible's theme of restoration infuse hope into your daily life?

DAY 3

READ:

Zephaniah 3:9-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Zephaniah 3:11

NOTES

There are some scary verses in the Bible. Perhaps none is more frightening than Jesus's words in Luke 8:17, stating all things will be revealed. The Old Testament version of this is Numbers 32:23, revealing that our sins will catch up to us and be found out. What is worse than knowing who we really are with all our secret sins being found out? How will we feel when we are so exposed?

The shame associated with this scenario feels unbearable, doesn't it? It's one thing to bring our sins out into the light ourselves, but when others do it for us, the shame increases tenfold. Our shame before others is profound, so imagine the feeling before the holy God. On the great and final judgment day, the day of the Lord, when we stand before God, how will we possibly stand as all our secret sins are shown for the darkness they truly are?

The truth is we can't stand in that day. Not unless we have a covering. For the unrepentant, it will be a day of shame that leads to hell. But what about for the believer? Zephaniah 3:11 tells us something shocking: For those of humble faith in the Lord, though their sins are as great, if not greater, than the unrepentant, on that day, they will not be put to shame. All their evil deeds and all their secret sins will be removed by the atoning blood of Jesus (Eph. 1:7).

So here's the deal God makes with us right now: All our shame for all Christ's grace. We can look to the cross right now and see our shame hanging there. Jesus was totally humiliated for us because of us. And He's offering the fullness of His grace to us today. All we have to do is believe it and accept it.

If we will accept His offer, then on that day of judgment, God will pronounce His righteousness over us because of Jesus. We will not be banished from His presence but welcomed in forever.

Where in your shame do you need to trust the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on the cross today?

DAY 4

READ:

Zephaniah 3:9-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Zephaniah 3:12-13

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #75: SANCTIFICATION

After we are justified by faith, declared to be in right standing with God through the righteousness of Christ, we undergo a lifetime of sanctification where we are continually made more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; 2 Thess. 2:13). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a present position (we have already been sanctified) and as a continuing process. Sanctification affects the whole of a person, transforming one's heart, mind, and character to reflect that of Jesus.

We might wonder sometimes what the secret to the Christian life is. Why does it often feel so hard to grow in godliness? Why does our faith feel so wooden and dry at times? While there can be many different reasons, let's consider just one: pride.

Our pride gets in the way of our growth in Christ more than anything else. It is the sin beneath every other sin. It is the sin that keeps us from laying ourselves before God in total dependence. Even pushed into the darkest corner, our flesh cries out that we still have control and we can still make a strong effort to get ourselves out.

Consider, however, the life of Jesus. He lived a perfectly humble life. I once heard a preacher say Jesus never got up in the morning and thought, "What do I want to do today?" He was always about His Father's business (Luke 2:49). Though Son is divine, He submitted control of His schedule to the Father. He let people interrupt His plan. He stopped to talk and heal and teach on the way to wherever He was going.

Jesus's humility, of course, was best seen at the cross. He humbled Himself to the point of death, Paul says in Philippians 2:8. He laid down His life, though He had done nothing wrong. He was the perfect man with perfect obedience, and He willingly went to the cross to die for sinful people like us. That is the epitome of humility. This is the goal to which all Christians strive: dying to the flesh so that we might live to God (Gal. 5:24-25).

There is good news on this front. Though the fight feels so strong right now, it will not always be so. God will redeem all His people completely one day, and then humility will not be something we strive for—it will be who we are. We will finally be like Jesus as fully as we can possibly be.

How does the example of Jesus's humility inspire you to humble yourself today?

DAY 5

READ:

Zephaniah 3:14-20

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Zephaniah 3:17

NOTES

Perhaps no verse in the Bible is as shocking to our understanding of an almighty God and our awe of Him as Zephaniah 3:17. God sings? Because He delights in me?

Think of your birthday when everyone gathers to sing in celebration of your new year. What goes through your mind? Perhaps you feel uncomfortable. Maybe you want to join in the singing. It's difficult for many simply to be still and accept the song from others. We sense we don't deserve the attention, or at the very least, we aren't comfortable with it.

Imagine, then, this scene: Jesus Himself steps out of heaven and comes into the room with you right now. With eyes like a flame of fire, He looks at you and smiles. You're already uncomfortable. Maybe you want to run away, but He's standing in the doorway and He's too big to get around.

Then He starts rejoicing. He's clapping and hollering like His team just won the World Series. Then He suddenly stops and looks at you so intently with affection that you wonder if you can endure the next few moments. It feels as if it lasts forever. Then He starts singing. It takes you by surprise, but you soon realize He's singing about you, delighting in you.

Maybe that sounds too far-fetched for you, but the Bible says this is the believer's future. Jesus rejoices in you. Not because of what you've done, or even will do, but because of who He is. He loves you because He is love and you are His creation and child. He loves you and you can't do anything about it but accept it.

Sometimes it's easy to receive love, and sometimes it's difficult. Either way, the truth is that God loves you more than you can ever know. Even knowing everything about you—the good, the bad, and the ugly—He loves you still, delighting in you and singing over you.

How do you need to receive the love of Jesus today?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"I tell you again that He cannot reject you—that would be to alter His whole Character and 'un-Christ' Himself! To spurn a coming sinner would un-Jesus Him and make Him to be somebody else, and not Himself any longer. 'He cannot deny Himself.' Go and try Him! Go and try Him."²

—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

POINT 1: The Lord saves the repentant (Zeph. 2:1-3).

The Lord graciously called His sinful people to gather together so they could hear the threat of His _____ and respond so as to be _____ from it.

The only hope for salvation from God's judgment is to fall on God's _____. He calls on His people to seek righteousness and seek humility, and only the _____ will repent and obey.



Why does humility please the Lord?

POINT 2: The Lord restores the faithful (Zeph. 3:9-11).

The Lord, in His grace, has promised to bring restoration to _____ people, which will include people from every tribe, nation, and _____. Then they will _____ the one true God together in purity.



What are some ways our speech is tainted by the effects of sin?

On the great day of the Lord, God's people will recognize God's _____ and forgiveness as He removes all _____ and _____ influences that lead to sin and shame.



Why is pride such a devastating attitude and sin?

POINT 3: The Lord purifies the humble (Zeph. 3:12-13).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #75: SANCTIFICATION

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What should sanctification look like in this world plagued by sin?

The Lord has promised a day when His people will be marked by perfect _____, holiness, and _____ because He has made them so.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been purified of our sins in Christ Jesus, we live with expectancy of Jesus's return as we make Him known to others so that they too might turn from sin and fear.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways you might be trying to earn your own salvation?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you will respond to the truth of the gospel?
- **HANDS:** With whom will you share the good news of Jesus Christ this week?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"A natural man's confessions run through him as water through a pipe. They do not affect him at all. But true confession leaves heart-wounding impressions on a man. David's soul was burdened in the confession of his sins: 'as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me' (Psalm 38:4). It is one thing to confess sin—and another thing to feel sin's wounds."³

—Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)