

Zephaniah 3:14

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[0 : 00] Sing, O daughter of Zion, but why must the daughter sing?

Now many reasons are given in Zephaniah's prophecy for why the daughter must sing. But I wonder if there is a more beautiful one than this.

The daughter sings because the father also sings. This psalm of joy that is incorporated into the prophecy that encompasses verses 14 to verse 17, it begins with this call to the daughter of Zion to sing, and it ends with a beautiful description of the father rejoicing over the daughter with singing.

The Lord your God, He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing. And this beautiful picture painted by Zephaniah of God's family united in song forms part of the bigger picture that we were considering this morning, the day of the Lord, a day of God's wrath and anger and judgment, but also a day of hope and blessing.

Now this morning our focus was on judgment, and this evening we will fix our attention on hope and blessing. The day of the Lord as a day of hope and blessing.

[1 : 42] The reality of hope in the midst of judgment, indeed we can say more than that, the reality of hope as a result of judgment, blessing as a product of judgment, is to be found throughout the prophecy, but is especially found from verse 9 of chapter 3, from where we began our reading this evening, through to the end of the prophecy.

And within that section, this theme is to be supremely found in what has been called the Psalm of Joy, from verses 14 to 17 of chapter 3.

I want to try and consider the whole of the section that we've read from verse 9, but we'll do so using the Psalm of Joy that is to be sung on the day of the Lord as our text, from where we will, as required and as time permits, make reference to what comes before and after the Psalm.

So before from verses 9 through to 13, and after from verses 18 to 20. But our particular attention will be on verses 14 to 17.

The picture and reality of the daughter of Zion, God's people, singing to their God and Father, and of the Father of Zion, the Lord our God, singing over us in such a, it is such a striking and beautiful one that I want to use these pictures to guide us through our discovery of the nature of the hope and blessing that are essential to the day of the Lord.

[3 : 25] So we're going to think about the daughter, the daughter of Zion, singing to God, singing to the Lord, singing to her Father, and then also think of the Father singing over His daughter, singing over His people.

So let's think, first of all, of what we're told concerning the daughter, the daughter of Zion, singing to her Father. We're going to pose two or three questions that will help us tease out some of what we find in this passage.

We're going to ask, when does the daughter sing? How is the daughter to sing? And why does the daughter sing? And then we'll pose these same questions of the Father.

But let's begin with, the daughter sing, O daughter of Zion. When does the daughter sing? I think it's clear enough that Zephaniah envisages the people of God singing on the day of the Lord.

Within this psalm, as it's been called, these verses from 14 to 17, we have specific reference, as we've had throughout the prophecy, to that day.

[4 : 37] And verse 16, on that day, they will say to Jerusalem, do not fear, O Zion, and so on and so forth. So I think it's clear that Zephaniah has in mind that day, whenever that day is, will be a day when Zion will sing.

Given that the language of this section, from verse 9 through to the end of the chapter, paints a picture, certainly at certain points, it paints a picture of perfection, of future perfection.

I wonder if we're to conclude that this is not a song for today. Let's just notice one occasion where the picture painted seems to be of something that is as yet not realized in the experience of God's people.

In verse 13, notice what it said, the remnant of Israel will do no wrong. They will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down, and no one will make them afraid.

Now, this is a beautiful picture. It's a wonderful prospect, but I think we'd all agree that it is that. It is a prospect. It's not our present reality. We are presently the people of God.

[5 : 50] We are the daughter of Zion, but the manner in which the daughter of Zion is described here is not one that concords with our present experience.

Do we draw from that that equally, when there is this call to sing on that day, that too is something that is for another day, a future day.

Are we perhaps a bit like the exiles in Babylon as we've sung who lamented, how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

How can we sing when these things that are said of us still seem to be so far from being true? We noticed this morning how the day of the Lord has both a present and a future aspect.

The Lord acts in judgment and blessing throughout history, with history punctuated by particular days when God extends His arm of judgment and blessing.

[6 : 53] But the Bible is also clear that human history will reach a crescendo and climax in one great day of the Lord. Now, recognizing that that is so, how does this understanding help us answer the question, when are we to sing?

Well, let me suggest three scenarios or three occasions when we are to sing as the daughter of Zion. We are to sing as we consider how God has already acted in judgment and blessing in favor of His people.

When we think of the historical circumstances of the prophet Zephaniah, and when we read how the prophecy ends in verse 20, at that time I will gather you, at that time I will bring you home.

We can't but imagine that part of what is being said here, part of what is being envisaged here, is how the people, under God's judgment, would be exiled to Babylon, but after 70 years that God had intimated, they would indeed be able to return home.

They would be brought home to Jerusalem. So, is there not partial fulfillment in that return from exile? And so, when we consider how on that occasion God acted in judgment and blessing on behalf of His people as we think back to what He has done for us, we can sing in gratitude.

[8 : 24] We think of the exodus from Egypt, and then as we move forward in time, we think principally, and above all else, we think of the coming and of the saving work of Messiah Jesus, and we think back on all of these things, and as we do, we are drawn and encouraged to sing, to sing to our God, to sing joyfully and gratefully for all that He has done in the past.

But then, we are to sing as we discern God acting in the present in judgment and blessing in our own lives and in the world round about us.

But then also, we can, of course, look forward, and we are to sing as we anticipate with prophetic confidence how God will act in the future. We've already thought of that final verse, verse 20, how it perhaps knew partial fulfillment, in the return from exile, but we know that it will know full fulfillment, complete fulfillment when the Lord returns and all of His people are gathered together and we're all brought home.

And as we anticipate that day, we can also sing in grateful anticipation of what God has promised to do and will do. In this matter of singing, in grateful anticipation of what we have yet to experience and of what God has yet to do for us.

Listen to John Calvin on this aspect of praise grounded in our prophetic expectation. These are words that he speaks or writes in connection with this passage that we are thinking about.

[10 : 15] And the words that we're going to read are words that he is applying particularly to the original audience, but I think they can also apply to ourselves. We read, the faithful are exhorted to praise God the same as if they had already enjoyed his blessings, which were yet remote and seemed concealed from their view.

So when are we to sing? Well, we sing as we look back and remember with gratitude to what God has done in the past, to how he has acted in judgment and blessing in favor of his people.

We sing as we see how today God continues to act in our favor, but we sing also as we look forward and anticipate what he has yet to do for us.

And this aspect of anticipating the great and final day of the Lord should also be understood in the light of the fact that in Old Testament prophecy, almost invariably the first and second coming of the Messiah are viewed as one great redemptive act on the part of God.

And in that sense, we can think of ourselves today as living in that great day of the Lord, even if the climax of the day, the midnight hour we might say, still lies in the future.

[11 : 35] For ourselves, they seem so distinct. The Lord came 2,000 years ago and he'll come in the future. We don't know when. And it seems such a great distance.

But for the prophets, there was not that same sense of distinguishing the two events. They speak of them in a manner that they are deemed and considered one great redemptive act of God.

And that perception or that understanding also helps us consider this matter. What we can certainly say as we think of the past and as we think of the present and as we look forward to the future, what we certainly can say with confidence is that the daughter of Zion, God's people, is to sing now.

Now we have reason to sing. Now is the time for us to sing. So that didn't answer to the question, when is the daughter of Zion to sing?

But let's think also of how is the daughter to sing? How are we to sing? Well, let's look at what the passage says there and particularly in verse 14. Sing, O daughter of Zion, shout aloud, O Israel, be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

[12 : 48] How are we to sing? We are to sing with energy and jubilation. Shout aloud, O Israel. We are to sing with gladness and joy.

We are to sing from the heart, be glad and rejoice with all your heart. And this reminder that our praise to God must flow from the heart reminds us that spiritual worship, worship that is pleasing to God can only proceed from a new heart.

God-pleasing worship cannot be produced by an act of the will or be drawn out by emotional manipulation or even aided by musical skill or dexterity.

These things cannot produce spiritual praise because spiritual praise is from the heart. Be glad and rejoice with all your heart.

So the question that we need to ask ourselves, the self-examination that is required as we consider how are we to sing, first of all, is to ask, well, how's my heart? Is my heart a restored, redeemed, cleansed heart capable of bringing praise to the one who has redeemed me?

[14 : 04] Is our heart capable of God-pleasing praise? How is the daughter to sing? But then, Zephaniah, very particularly in what follows, goes on to consider why the daughter sings.

Why is the daughter of Zion to sing to her God? And Zephaniah identifies a number of reasons why the daughter of Zion is to sing.

And we can notice three of them. And we simply need to read what Zephaniah goes on to say. First of all, there in verse 15, we read, the Lord has taken away your punishment.

The Lord has taken away your punishment. For us, in the light of the coming of Messiah Jesus, we know how the Lord has done this. He has done so by means of sacrifice.

He has done so by an act of judgment. Jesus, on the cross, became sin and accursed as He bore the wrath and judgment of God and the punishment for sin that we deserved.

[15 : 10] And in that manner, in that awful way we might say, using that word in its literal sense, our punishment has been taken away, has been removed.

and that is true for all of us who have placed our trust in what Jesus has done on our behalf. But notice also as we expand our gaze to what has gone before in the prophecy, notice the global reach of this removal of punishment as this section begins in verse 9 where our reading began, certainly, then will I purify the lips of the peoples, all the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve Him shoulder to shoulder.

Jews and Gentiles in this very visible image that is presented, shoulder to shoulder serving the Lord, singing praise to God.

a God. Why does the daughter sing? Well, the daughter sings because the Lord has taken away our punishment. But Zephaniah goes on, he goes on to say that He has turned back your enemy.

Another reason why we are to sing, because the enemy has been turned back. And again, as we consider these matters in the light of Calvary, in the light of the cross, we know that on the cross, all the enemies of God and of His people were defeated.

[16 : 45] We also know that the devil and his hosts remain a ferocious force, but they are a defeated one. And to understand that, it's sometimes being suggested or the comparison has been made that the age in which we live, the age between the victory that was wrought at Calvary and the culmination of all things, when the Lord returns in glory and gathers His people to Himself.

This in-between stage, for want of a better description, has sometimes been compared to the time between D-Day and V-E-Day. That's a very topical application or picture that we can paint, and some of you have maybe heard this suggested in the past.

In this past week, we've been reading so much about D-Day, the Normandy landings, on the 6th of June, 1944. And many who study these matters would conclude that it was on that day that the war was won.

On that day, the victory was secured. But victory in Europe was still a year away. V-E-Day was on the 8th of May, 1945.

And though on D-Day the victory was won, still between that day and the ultimate culmination of the war, there would still be casualties. The enemies would still fire their weapons and would still ferociously seek to do the worst that they could to our troops.

[18 : 18] And perhaps in a small way, that gives us some idea. On D-Day at Calvary, the victory was won. The enemies were defeated, but until the Lord returns, the devil and his hosts, a defeated foe, but still a ferocious one seeking to do as much damage as he has permitted to do.

And so we have here another reason why the daughter is to sing, because he has turned back our enemies. But Zephaniah goes on and gives us another reason why we are to sing.

There, as we continue reading in verse 15, the Lord, the King of Israel, is with you. Never again will you fear any harm. In these words, in this expression, we have a powerful expression that highlights this already and not yet.

God is with us in the here and now. In Jesus, we experience God with us. Emmanuel, God with us. At Pentecost, today is Pentecost Sunday, and we know that at Pentecost, God came down to be with us in the person of his Holy Spirit.

And so that is true today. what Zephaniah says, the Lord, the King of Israel, is with you. That's true today. But then he goes on and says, never again will you fear any harm.

[19 : 41] And we think, well, hang on a minute. Is that true today? Is that my experience? Has fear been wholly banished from my experience? And we say, well, no. I still know what it is to fear.

There are still things that terrify me, that scare me. And so we recognize that these blessings, speak of that which we now enjoy, but also they look forward to that which we have yet to fully inherit, that which we have fully to experience.

The banishment of fear as yet a future blessing. But even as a future blessing, we can still sing giving thanks for that which awaits, as we also sing for that which we currently know and experience, the presence of God with us.

So the daughter sings to the father. But also we have this particularly intriguing and beautiful picture painted of the father singing over his daughter.

In verse 17, he will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing. Let's ask these same questions of the father and of his singing over his daughter.

[20 : 58] When does he sing? Now on the very few occasions that I've heard reference made to this beautiful text, it's usually been taken as a given, assumed or suggested that the stage for the father's singing is heaven, that this is a future recital, one that we in the future might enjoy hearing.

A yet to be experienced delight. And no doubt there is a sense in which that is true. But we have to, in a sense, balance that with a recognition that our God is an eternal God.

And the cause of his singing that we're going to look at in a moment is not to be limited only to the future. God sings eternally. If we think even of today and if we think of one example perhaps, that would allow us to see and to picture how even today we could imagine, even if we can't audibly hear God singing from heaven.

But think about what Jesus says when Jesus speaks of one sinner who repents. And what does he say is the consequence of that in heaven?

Well he tells us that there's rejoicing in heaven, that there's celebration in heaven over one sinner who repents. Indeed, if tonight one sinner here were to repent, there would be that celebration and rejoicing in heaven.

[22 : 29] Does that not, I ask, I suggest, I propose, does that not, might that not involve heavenly song as the hosts of heaven celebrate one more of God's elect being drawn into his family.

family. But as we look forward to the culmination of all things, one writer, as some of you will be familiar with him, John Piper, he waxes lyrical in a manner that perhaps goes beyond what is warranted by the text.

But I'll say what he says and you can come to your own conclusions. He's thinking, he's pondering on this picture of God singing and this is what he says.

What would happen if God sang? When God spoke, the heavens and the earth were created. When God sings, the new heavens and a new earth come into being.

Well, I don't know what you make of that suggestion. I think it is speculative, but though speculative, it's a picture that perhaps echoes what we find in the prophet Isaiah, where God speaks through the prophet.

[23 : 45] And listen to what we read there. This is in chapter 65 of Isaiah and reading from 17, verse 17 to verse 19. And notice the similarity in language and perhaps you can come to your own conclusions.

And we read, Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create.

For I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. And then listen to what God says. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people.

The sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Very similar language employed by God through the prophet Isaiah, as we find here in Zephaniah's prophecy where we are presented with this picture of God rejoicing over His people with singing.

When does God sing? When does the father sing? But the next question, the same question we posed of the daughter, how does he sing?

[25 : 00] Well, verse 17 gives us some insight into how the father sings. The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you.

The father sings over his daughter delightfully, we might say. He will quiet you with his love. The father sings over his daughter tenderly.

Now, this phrase translated, he will quiet you with his love, is a phrase that can be translated in different ways. And one of the ways in which it can be translated gives the sense that it is God who is quiet.

And one possible translation will be, he will be quiet in his love. And the picture could be, the picture could be of a mother or indeed a father gazing in silent love and wonder at her or their baby.

He will be quiet in his love or he will quiet you with his love. The different possibilities, just even those two, do share in common the sense of the tender love of the father for his daughter.

[26 : 13] And so we certainly can say that the father sings over his daughter not only delightfully but tenderly. And then in the final part of the verse where there is this explicit reference to singing, he will rejoice over you with singing.

The father sings over his daughter joyfully. Do you hear him sing? Well, you will. And when you do, when we do, we will stand, I'm sure, dumbfounded, staggered, speechless for a moment, perhaps even songless, that he is singing over us.

He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing. But then finally, why does he sing?

And we can answer this question in the same way that we answered the same question with respect to the daughter. But now, from the father's perspective, why does he sing? Well, the daughter sings because her punishment has been taken away.

And we can say that the father sings because he has taken away our sin. He sings as he delights in the work of his son on our behalf.

[27 : 32] He sings as the daughter sings because the enemy has been turned back. He sings in victory that he has defeated all his and our enemies.

And as the daughter sings because God is with us, so the father sings because he is with us and we are with him. And this, of course, is the ultimate fulfillment of his covenant purposes because at the very heart of God's purposes, for and with his people, is that he would be our God and we would be his people.

We're reminded of what God said through the prophet Ezekiel in chapter 37 and in verse 27. My dwelling place will be with them. I will be their God and they will be my people.

Why does the father sing? He sings because he is with us and we are with him. But as we give thought to these matters, we're left with a final question or a final question certainly that I would want to pose to you.

Now what? Now what? As we think about the call that is made to us to sing, as we think of the many reasons that we have to sing, as we ponder on what is something very difficult for us maybe to conceive or to imagine of the father singing over us.

[29 : 01] Nonetheless, we're left with a question, what now? What does this mean for us today in the light of what God has done, in the light of what God yet will do? Can we not listen to the words also found in this psalm of joy that speak to us today?

And what do we read that is so applicable and so necessary for us to hear today? There at the very heart of the psalm in verse 16. Do not fear, O Zion.

Do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. And God comes to us and says, He says, don't be discouraged. Don't give up.

Don't imagine that your labor is in vain. Don't think that all is against you and nothing can be done and nothing can be achieved and we live in a day of small things and all those things that would discourage you and dishearten you.

And God comes and says, no, don't. Don't fear. Don't let your hands hang limp. Don't throw in the towel. Don't give up. Sing. Sing. Sing.

[30 : 07] You have good reason to sing. Sing as you consider what God has already done for you, what He is doing for you, what He will yet do for you. Sing as you stand in wonder at the fact that this God, the Creator of the universe, rejoices over you.

Ponder on these things. And don't fear. Don't lose heart. Don't let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you now. And He is mighty to save now.

And so let us hear these words of encouragement and challenge and exhortation and let us go and go singing and serving and confident that God is with us and He is mighty to save.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for all that we learn in the Bible concerning ourselves and also very especially all we learn concerning Yourself.

We thank You for the God that You are. We thank You that You are a God who delights in Your people. We thank You that You are a God who rejoices in Your own. We thank You that You are a God who sings over us, rejoices over us with singing.

[31 : 15] And Lord, we pray that in the light of all these things that we would indeed take heart, that we would be persuaded that You are with us and that You are and ever have been and ever will be mighty to save.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.