

Zephaniah 2:1-3 – Church: Get Your Act Together

TSK, HebrewLexicon, Henry, Geneva, Delitzsch, Trapp, Poole, Barnes, Clarke, JFB, Handfuls, Calvin, Expositor, INT, Ps4, 32

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: You might have been shocked by the language of judgment God announced on the Jews in the 1st chapter Zephaniah's prophecy. And it was quite shocking language! **Their judgment was going to be soon, severe, and sure.** But God did not do that to drive them to hopelessness, as if judgment was inevitable. **God did this to drive them to him –to repent in sackcloth and ashes.** And this is what you see in this chapter.

Our headings are: Judah must...

Resolve to work together for a solution

Remember the Lord's judgment is soon

Repent so they could avoid his judgment

Our goals are: **That you will see God's strong language of judgment, even hyperbole, was issued in order to drive his covenant people to repentance and that you will then hope, preach, and pray for the church to repent.**

Resolve to work together for a Solution

1 **Gather yourselves** together, yes, **gather together**, O undesirable nation,

1. There is no question Judah needed to repent of his selfishness and idolatry.

The whole nation needed to change – not just a change in one or two people. So God called them together.

(I don't know how God could be so gracious to people who treated him with such disdain, but he was!)

2. So God called the leaders and the people to “gather together.”

a. They were make the effort to gather to repent.

Joel 1:14 Consecrate a fast, **Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders**
And all the inhabitants of the land Into the house of the LORD your God,
And **cry out to the LORD.**

The leaders had to summon the people together and lead them in repentance. **If the leaders did not bring the people together to repent the whole nation would be blown away...**all over the world by the Babylonians. So this was a life and death struggle for the nation.

This language of “gathering themselves together” is not incidental. That word for “gathering” was particularly clear in the mind of the Jews who were told to gather stubble to make bricks while they suffered in Egypt. They had to make a strong resolved to survive. If they did not gather sufficient stubble, they were beaten or killed.

Exodus 5:7 "You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. **Let them go and gather straw for themselves.**

b. Then the Jews had to have an introspection to see their sins. Most don't like to look at their own sins!

Jeremiah 16:10 "And it shall be, when you show this people all these words, and they say to you, 'Why has the LORD pronounced all this great disaster against us? Or what is our iniquity? Or what is our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?'

c. "Gather" is intensive.

It meant "to gather piece by piece." And notice the repetition of "gather" for emphasis. This was hard work!

3. The leaders and the people needed to know that they were an undesirable nation before God by the way they were living.

Gold is desirable. Judah was not! And they needed to ask the hard questions and do so sincerely: How did we come into this position? How do we get out of his predicted destruction? How do we live so we don't fall into this predicament again? And they had to resolve to fix the problem!

4. Lessons:

a. The church today is living in a state of lethargy and unrepentance. This will bring pain – deep pain – pain like Judah endured in Babylon. We seem so unwilling to commit to repentance because we like where we are.

b. But pastor and elders must call the church to examine herself. She needs introspection to see how lazy she has become. This work starts with the elders and pastors. Fathers must regularly do this in the home.

2 Corinthians 13:5 **Examine yourselves** as to whether you are in the faith. **Test yourselves.** Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified.

It is true as you get old you try to hide our age...behind make-up and sunglasses, but that won't work with your sins. Don't paint over your sins. **God sees through paint!** Pastors must warn the church against the use of spiritual make-up.

Proverbs 28:13 **He who covers his sins will not prosper,** but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

c. Pastor and elders must called the whole church to be united as she examines herself.

You need more than leaders. You need more than congregation. You need both. Further, you need **Christians from all denominations to work and support each other.** Pray for each other. Help each other out of the hole we are in! So don't just pray for the URCNA.

Remember the Lord's Judgment is coming soon

2 **Before the decree is issued,** Or the day **passes like chaff,** Before

the LORD'S fierce anger comes upon you, **Before the day of the LORD'S anger comes** upon you!

1. While God had stated in what seemed like certain terms the judgment that was coming on Judah, he left the possibility that Judah might repent.

The decree for destruction had not been issued yet.

Jeremiah 18:7 "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, **8 "if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent** of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.

That day, he pointed out, would come quickly...just as quickly as chaff is blown away. If the Jews were good grain, they would remain. If they were chaff, they would be blown away.

2. But even as God reminded the Jews that the decree had not been issued yet, he reiterated that soon a day of fierce anger would come on them if they did not repent.

The Lord was urging urgency! That is the same language Jesus used against those who refused to repent.

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and **he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**"

Judgment was knocking at the door.

3. Lessons:

a. If you have a fight with God, agree with him quickly. Don't be stubborn before him! He is right. You are wrong. And the same thing is true for the church. The church must not say God's ways are too stringent and we need to loosen up the standard. The church must say: Lord, what would you want me to do! And do it quickly!

Proverbs 28:14 Happy is the man who is always reverent, But **he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.**

b. Examine yourself. See if you are contributing to the laziness of the church? Ask: Have I ever invited someone to worship? Do I talk with a visitor who comes to church? Do I pray for all our children...or your pastor? Do I encourage my husband to be a good leader? Am I embarrassed to say that I am a Christian? **Do I think that Christianity is just a small personal decision, something I don't have to share!** Do some introspection.

1 Corinthians 11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

Repent so you could avoid judgment

3 Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. **Seek righteousness,** seek humility. It may be that **you will be hidden** In the day of the LORD'S anger.

1. The Lord called on Judah, after they examined themselves, and seeing the nearness of his coming in judgment, to repent of their sins and return to the Lord.

God knew that if Judah saw his weakness he would repent. And repentance was requisite.

The Lord could not change his standard. His justice had to be maintained. And the word “seek” is use intensively. **It means to look hard!** And it means to **look for God’s favor** by following God’s directives. “Seeking the Lord” is not the meaningless performance of rites (singing of songs, etc.) that might look religious but has no submissive hearts behind it.

2. And the meek were going hear the call of the leaders and repent!

There are always those who are defiant. When there is trouble they don’t humble themselves but want to fight against God. This is why God called the meek to repent. The arrogant were going to be sold as far as India and Africa.

Jeremiah 45:5 And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh," says the LORD. "But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go.

The meek would be preserved! “Meek” did not refer to those who are timid. “Meek” referred to those who humbled themselves before God...as Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount. Yes, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth...but the arrogant would be tossed aside.

Isaiah 11:4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, **And decide with equity for the meek of the earth;** He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.

Psalms 37:11 But the **meek** shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Matthew 15:14 "Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."

3. And that repentance had to be much more than being sorry.

Repentance is: hating sin, forsaking sin, and turning and living obediently before the Lord.

4. The Lord does use an interesting picture to show how he might save his repentant people: He would cover them!

Isaiah 26:20 Come, my people, enter your chambers, And shut your doors behind you; Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, Until the indignation is past.

This protection was beautifully pictured for us in the life of Noah. They were covered from the rains.

Genesis 7:1 Then the LORD said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this

generation.

5. This call to repentance had to be a careful and constant effort.

6. Lessons:

a. Repent but don't assume temporal consequences of your sins will be removed. The eternal consequences will be removed...but not always the temporary one. If you drink, drive, cause an accident, kill someone, and repent, God will forgive you, but you might still have to go to jail. On a church level, it may take a long time to see the church revived, but it must start with repentance. Stains can be hard to remove.

b. The blessings for Judah's repentance showed the great love God had for them. He would give them the inheritance of the people who were around whom God had destined for destruction! And this is what he has promised to you. He has promised you the nations. So remove obstacles to stay close to him.

c. Do not stop praying for and preaching to the arrogant that God would humble them. God sent prophet after prophet to Judah before some repented and he saved them. The same thing is true today. That is how God works. Pray. Preach. Persist.

d. Look for meek friends, pastor, and elders. Look for meek husbands and wives. They will keep you close to the Lord. Look also at Amos 5:6.

Psalms 25:9 The humble He guides in justice, And **the humble He teaches His way.**

Psalms 149:4 For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will **beautify the humble with salvation.**

1 Peter 5:6...**humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,** that He may exalt you in due time,

Conclusion:

Within God's covenant people (yes, God's covenant people-church members) were many who had become drunken with lusts...lust for creature comforts...idolatry...and they therefore apostatized. God called them to get their act together and repent or be dispersed as slaves throughout the world.

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Confess your sins and the sins of the church. God has sent many preachers to warn you to do this. Only by doing this will the church be restored to its rightful place and Christ given his rightful glory. Proverbs 28:13 He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

2. Challenge the church to repent. Maybe God may yet turn his face from the judgment that is at our doors. Psalms 78:38 But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, And did not

destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath;

3. Consider that God's love is not deficient. When he sent Jesus to die for you he meant it. Lethargy can take over if you forget the bloody cross where the Savior gave his life for his people. So think of the cross when we celebrate the Lord's Supper...challenge the church to repent and confess her idolatry.

Finally, if you are not a Christian you are living for yourself. **That means you are a practicing atheist.** There is only one God and you refuse to believe in him. It means you will die and go to hell. But there is hope. You must call on God and ask him to help you to see he is real, that your sins pose eternal danger to you, and that Christ sacrificed himself for sinners like you.