

The Pure Language of Grace
Zephaniah 3:9-13
By Randy Wages
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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction:

- A. In Romans 10:13, God declares to us that “...*whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” You may recall we considered this verse in the last message I delivered here. And we saw that in the Bible, the name of the Lord refers to more than just a title by which He is to be addressed.
- B. Well in studying for that previous message, I did a Bible search of that phrase, “call upon the name of the Lord.” And one of the passages I found caught my eye and spawned the idea for today’s message. In Zephaniah 3:9, God, speaking through the Prophet, says, “*For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.*”
- C. Our text for today will begin here at verse 9 and extend through verse 13 of Zephaniah, chapter 3. These 5 verses speak of the most wonderful blessing that could ever be bestowed upon anyone – the blessing of eternal salvation, everlasting joy and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ. I certainly hope and pray that this of interest to you.
- D. As this opening verse of today’s text indicates, this blessing of salvation is for a people that God will turn to so that they might embrace a pure language. And it says He will do so that (or in order) that they may call upon the name of the Lord – the name that whosoever calls upon shall be saved. Recall that our Lord told His disciples in the book of Mark to preach the Gospel to all the world and that those that believe the Gospel shall be saved.
- E. So from these 3 passages we know then that this pure language by which these eternally blessed sinners are enabled to truly call upon the name of the Lord for salvation, is none other than the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ – “The Pure Language of Grace” as I’ve so titled today’s message.

II. Background: First let me share a bit of background...

- A. The Prophet Zephaniah was a contemporary of King Josiah and of the Prophet Jeremiah. He prophesied to Judah and Jerusalem in the days leading up to their being taken into the Babylonian captivity.
- B. Verses 1-8:
 - 1. And as we reach this 3rd and last chapter of Zephaniah, it opens with words of rebuke, which in the immediate context are directed toward the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem. The opening verses of this chapter describe their evil. But when we get down to the beginning of our text in verse 9, we see clearly that God, speaking through the Prophet, begins to address the eternal salvation of a people.

2. Accordingly, from the context here, we know that the preceding verses 1-8 may also be applied in a broader, spiritual sense as they not only describe the sinful state of Jerusalem and Judah, but provide a commentary on all of fallen humanity by nature. It describes man without God, without grace, without the truth – a description of us all as we’re born into this world.
3. Well after describing the depravity of fallen sinners in the opening verses of Zephaniah 3, he goes on to warn that God is just and that no sinner will escape God’s just judgment against their sins. Either your sins were judged and punished in Christ who died as a Substitute for all who are saved (whose shed blood alone could and did pay in full the debt owed to God’s holy justice), or else you will be cast into hell’s misery, eternally separated from God, personally experiencing God’s just wrath against your sins. But one way or the other, His justice will be served. And yet, in spite of these warnings, we’re told in verse 7 that they “rose early” to participate in their corrupt doings – the sense being they couldn’t wait to get involved with their iniquities which included the practice of their religion – a sinful practice because it was based upon iniquity, as in that which is inequitable, expecting God to bless them and accept them based upon that which does not measure up to our holy God’s standard of perfection. It misses the mark. That’s sin or iniquity.
4. So in these opening verses of Zephaniah 3, we have a description not only of Jerusalem, but a description of all of us by nature as sinners born in spiritual darkness – fallen humanity, hell bent (so to speak) to eagerly try to establish our own righteousness, thinking we’re okay (spiritually speaking) as we make that judgment according to our own standard. That is, we are inclined to imagine that we’re okay – that we will be accepted by God while ignorant of (or not submitted to) the only righteousness by which any can be accepted before a holy God – the perfect righteousness by which God (in Acts 17:31) says all will be judged. God, through Zephaniah, declares that He is just and that all sin shall be justly dealt with.

III. Text: Zephaniah 3:9-13: But, there’s good news, for as we get to our text in verse 9, God, speaking through the Prophet, begins to describe the wonderful eternal salvation experienced by some from among such wicked sinners he had been describing in the prior verses.

- A. The Revelation of Grace, Verse 9: Beginning in verse 9 again we read, “***For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.***” Here in verse 9 we see in salvation that there is a (1) Revelation of Grace. God’s Gospel, this pure language of grace, must be brought our way and its life changing message revealed and applied to our hearts by God the Holy Spirit if we are to be saved.

1. God says here that He would turn to the people a pure language. When we get to the next verse, verse 10, we will see the Prophet spoke of those ***“from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,”*** meaning beyond just the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea. Credible commentators believe that this is in reference to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, when the Jews, both in their own land, and in the Gentile world, would have the Gospel preached to them, but would reject it. And that would occasion the Apostles to turn to the Gentiles as Christ commanded them to do when He said go into all the world, meaning to the Gentiles (or non-Jews) who prior to then had been without the Gospel and had only heard of judgments against them from the God of Israel. But now they would see a turn – a different voice from God in the Gospel, in this pure language of grace, a message that they had never heard before. They would hear the pure language of love, grace, mercy, peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation in another – in a suitable Substitute, the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. And so is the experience of all who are saved. The gospel of God’s grace in Christ must be brought their way. How privileged we are to have the pure language of grace preached in this place. It’s a pure language in that it is the word of truth – God’s truth as to how sinners are saved in opposition to the way of salvation that we naturally imagine before hearing this pure language. It’s pure in that it isn’t contaminated with the natural human reasoning of fallen, self-consumed, independent-minded sinners who imagine they can be saved apart from the one righteousness of God in Christ that we must have. Like me in years past, many attribute much of their salvation to Christ, but until God is pleased to reveal this pure language of grace to us, we cling to the notion that some response or action we take (or perhaps even some spiritual characteristic we find within us) makes the real difference in our salvation – not Christ whose name is deceptively invoked along side of the presumed real difference maker by our way of thinking.
3. This pure language is the pure doctrine of Christ mentioned in 2 John, vs 9, where we read, ***“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.”*** This doctrine of Christ is the truth concerning (1) who He is, both God and man which uniquely qualifies Him to accomplish His work of salvation. So it’s also (2) the truth of His accomplished work. Many scorn doctrine saying, “I’m not concerned with doctrine. All I know is I believe in God, I pray, I do my best so I’m okay.” But hear God’s word. Embracing and continuing in this doctrine of Christ (abiding in it) is evidence of whether one truly belongs to God or not. Now remember, this doctrine of Christ – setting forth His Person and work is connected to His name, “the name of the Lord” as it is set forth in scripture.

4. Notice in the first part of vs 9, it says. ***“For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD...”*** In other words, the pure language of the Gospel, the doctrine of Christ, is absolutely necessary in order for any to be able to call upon the name of the Lord in the sense that all who are saved are enabled to do. Looking back at that verse I first mentioned this morning, Romans 10:13, we would have also seen this vivid truth there had I included verse 14. As we read, ***“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. <Who? The same ones who abide in the doctrine of Christ, the same ones Christ referred to in the book of Mark saying, they that believe the Gospel, that pure language of grace, shall be saved> ¹⁴How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”***
5. There must be the revelation of Christ, His Person and work, as it is set forth in the Gospel of God’s grace – and that by God’s determined means, the preaching of the Gospel – this pure language. By the preached Gospel, when effectually applied by the Holy Spirit, we have revealed to us both the absolute necessity, the all-inclusive sufficiency, and certain effectiveness of Christ’s Person and work to save sinners such as we. And if the Spirit so blesses you, nothing else will do for you. Christ must be revealed through the preached Gospel in order for anyone to call upon His name with the Holy Spirit given understanding of (1) who Christ is and (2) what He has fully accomplished to save His people whereby His name is magnified – whereby God is glorified and revealed as He is, that He might be worshipped as He is – as both a just God and a Savior.
6. Now back to verse 9 again, we read, ***“For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”*** I direct your attention to that last phrase, ***“to serve him with one consent.”*** Your Bible may note as mine does that the Hebrew word translated “consent” is a word that means “shoulder.” This alludes to how believers (Jews and Gentiles alike) are yoked together as brothers and sisters in Christ, with a common bond as servants of righteousness, putting their shoulder to the wheel of grace, having embraced this pure language of grace, this doctrine of Christ’s Person and finished work. They are made to be of one mind and so serve with one consent.

Now, let’s look at verse 10 where we see...

- B. Verse 10, (2) The Redemptive Offering: ...the very basis or ground of salvation. Verse 10 reads, ***“From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my supplants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering.”***

1. As I've already mentioned, the phrase, "*From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia...*" means beyond the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea so as to include both Jews who had been dispersed as well as others from among all other nations, the Gentiles.
2. And notice it reads, "*my suppliants*" are the ones who bring this offering. A "suppliant" or supplicant is a petitioner, or a pleader. When we ask things of God in prayer we are said to bring our supplications or pleas to Him. So here we have described how those blessed with eternal salvation are made to be suppliants, as a people in need – one hungering and thirsting after the righteousness revealed in this pure language of the Gospel. As Christ said in Matthew 5:6, "*Blessed <eternally blessed> are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*" They are made to be mercy beggars and we know that by what they are said to bring.
3. God says they bring "*mine offering.*" That brings to mind the story of Abraham as he prepared to offer up his own beloved son Isaac to be killed on an altar as God had so commanded. And in that story that pictures the redemptive offering that Christ would make at Calvary's cross, when Isaac saw the fire and the wood he turned to his father Abraham and said, "I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham replied saying, "*...God will provide himself a lamb...*" (Gen. 22:8). And sure enough, as Abraham took his knife to slay his son in obedience to God, the angel of the Lord appeared and stopped him. And there behind Abraham was a ram caught in a thicket which Abraham then took and used for the burnt offering instead of his son.
4. And that is exactly what God did for the eternal salvation of these suppliants – these mercy beggars. He provided Himself a sacrifice – His offering. And that is what these blessed with eternal salvation learn of and are drawn to value in this pure language of the Gospel. They bring His offering as their only plea – the offering of God the Father's only begotten Son, the Lamb of God, the merits of the doing and dying of the Lord Jesus Christ – His very righteousness that was rendered in perfect satisfaction to God's holy law and justice by His obedience unto death. His perfect obedience to the Father satisfied not only the precepts of the holy law of God, but in so doing as a Substitute for sinners, He had to die in order to meet the penal demands due unto the justice of God the Father for their sins.

Now let's look at verse 11 where we see that in salvation there is a...

- C. Reversal of Judgment (Verse 11): a reversal in how things are judged once this pure language of grace is made effectual to the objects of grace – upon their hearing and believing God's Gospel. I'm speaking of an entirely new frame of reference that is given to those who are granted spiritual life so as to see their eternal salvation in Christ, their Substitute, based solely upon His redemptive work.

The 1st part of verse 11 reads, “***In that day*** <the day this pure language is effectually brought to you, the day of God’s power when you come to plead Christ and His righteousness alone for your salvation, in that day or when that has taken place...> ***shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me:...***” Now this needs some explanation because we know that the Bible teaches that believers are ashamed over their transgressions or sins. So knowing that God does not contradict Himself, we know that in this context it cannot be referring to that shame that always arises when one is given a sense of the evil of their sin before a holy God, having been convinced of sin by the Spirit. No, here this ‘not being ashamed’ speaks of the liberating release from the bondage of sin whereby we are not ashamed to approach God. Here in verse 11, this reversal in how the regenerated, born-again believer comes to perceive and judge things is described in 2 ways. Here in the 1st part of verse 11 we see the resulting...

- (a) New-found freedom from the bondage of sin which gives the believer every reason to be certain and sure of his or her salvation. The believer finds him or herself complete in Christ, accepted by God in the beloved, God’s beloved Son, the Savior, Jesus Christ. The saved come to the Lord by faith to see that their sins have all been taken away (past, present, future, even their sin in Adam), pardoned, forgiven, the guilt for them all having been fully paid, seeing their eternal justification before God by the death of Christ – that is, being declared NOT guilty (that’s what it means to be justified).
- (b) They rejoice in knowing that their sins were imputed or charged to His account that He might fully pay the just penalty due unto them. So that means their sins cannot be justly charged or imputed to them, As Paul quoted King David in Romans 4, beginning in verse 6 saying, “***Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, ⁷Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. ⁸Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.***”
- (c) I don’t want us to gloss over this reversal of judgment (this radical change in our frame of reference) that is experienced by all who are given spiritual life whereby they embrace God’s Gospel. For this results in freedom. To be free in Christ is to be free indeed – free to boldly approach God knowing they will not be found wanting, not be ashamed. In I John 2:28 John writes, “***And now, little children, abide in him; <i.e.- Christ> that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.***” How could I be ashamed (or found lacking) if my plea is none other than the perfect righteousness of God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ? Why would we cling to pleading our best when we can plead the impeccable perfection of God Himself – the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ?

(d) And Zephaniah is saying that one to whom God has brought near this pure language of the Gospel and made it effectual to his or her heart, such a vile sinner (as describes us all by nature) can boldly approach God as they are, without one plea, but that His blood was shed for thee – as sinners, but sinners saved by grace, sinners whose sins cannot condemn them for ***“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”***(Romans 8:1). Who walks after the Spirit? Those who are in Christ Jesus – who see their oneness with Him, whose righteousness is none other than His righteousness, freely imputed to them.

Well, I’ve noted that in verse 11 of our text we see the Reversal in how the regenerated, born-again believer comes to perceive and judge things (a Reversal in Judgment) and this reversal is described in 2 ways. In the 1st part of verse 11 we’ve seen the resulting (1) Release from the bondage of sin and now look with me again at verse 11.

2. Verse 11b, Repentance in a spirit of true humility: It reads, ***“In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: <He’s saying that they will not be ashamed> “...for <or because> then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain.”***

(a) Here we see a new-found humility that brings out true repentance of dead works. This speaks of the removal of religious pride. It is the height of sinful pride to dare to approach a holy God for salvation based upon something that proceeds from you, a sinner. That’s not God’s way of salvation as set forth in His Gospel – this pure language that when embraced enables them to call on His name for all of their salvation. That would be a way of salvation by works, not grace. And yet many professing, so-called Christians, in believing that Christ died for all men and women who ever lived, by the process of elimination are exposed to be looking to something then that they do or refrain from doing to make the real difference in their own salvation. If Christ did no more for those who are saved than those who perish, something else has to be the real determining factor – not Christ.

(b) But as Zephaniah describes here, those who are enabled through God’s pure language of the Gospel to call on His name (as is true of all who are saved), this eternally blessed group will not include those who rejoice in their own pride – in imagining that the ultimate, crowning event in their being saved is their decision for Jesus, or their acceptance of Him, or their act of faith, or their belief there’s a god, or their praying, or their church going, or something they see in themselves – rather than looking solely to the doing and dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. To look anywhere else is the ultimate manifestation of sinful religious pride and God hates it.

That would be to pridefully dare to imagine that your own sin-tainted work – whether that be your act of faith, your sincere religious interest, your acceptance of Jesus, your best efforts to live a good life, or whatever – could achieve for you what in reality took the doing and dying of the Lord of glory.

- (c) But this sinful pride is common to all of us prior to spiritual regeneration and conversion, prior to hearing and believing from the heart God’s pure language of grace – of salvation’s conditions having been single-handedly and fully met by the finished work of Christ – by His perfect obedience unto death on the cross as a Substitute for each and every one He saves.
- (d) In verse 11, the words “*mine holy mountain*” are believed to be referring to the temple which the Jews gloried in and on account of it, considered themselves secure – glorying in the sacrifices, their very religious practices offered up at the temple or holy mountain, rather than glorying in the one sacrifice of the eternal Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, which those animal sacrifices were intended to picture. The Jews (at least at times) were obeying the letter of the ceremonial law of Moses but, for the most part, with no regard for what was pictured. The scripture tells us that law was given as a schoolmaster to point them to Christ. But their confidence was in their religious ceremonies and practices.
- (e) And so God removes our haughty ideas that would have us look to our participation or our interest in spiritual things or our best efforts to obey, and to instead humbly come before Him in repentance – repenting of having dared to proudly imagine that something done by me, a sinner, could merit something from God – a repentance from what the scripture calls dead works – dead in that they are performed by a spiritually dead sinner and dead in that a reliance upon them for salvation leads to eternal death.

So, in verses 9-11 we’ve seen that in eternal salvation there is a (1) Revelation of Grace, (2) His Redemptive Offering that is pled, a (3) Reversal of how things are judged from a new frame of reference where they are (a) Released in their consciences from the bondage of sin and its condemning power and (b) they experience a Repentance from their former dead works with this new, God-given humility; and now in verse 12, we see there is also...

D. Change or Reversal in where they place their Trust, Verse 12: God, through the Prophet says in verse 12, “*I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.*”

1. In verse 11, God said the proud and haughty will be removed and left remaining will be what He calls an afflicted and poor people. Those God saves are humbled by the Holy Spirit, under this pure language of grace so as to see themselves as afflicted and poor, spiritually speaking. We discover the extent of our spiritual disease, the affliction of our sin, and how spiritually bankrupt we are – in such spiritual poverty so as to have nothing to offer that even comes close to measuring up to what it actually takes for such depraved, ungodly sinners to find acceptance before a holy God. It took God’s own offering of His dear Son on the cross. And with the revelation of this pure language of the Gospel we learn that we really are spiritually destitute – with no means to contribute even one iota to our own salvation. That describes those who truly plead and trust in Christ for all of their salvation, those who call on and trust in the name of the Lord. In salvation by God’s grace, we discover our desperate need of Him – the God-man whose accomplished righteousness we must have as our own.

 2. And so there is a reversal of where we place our trust. Before this pure language of grace was brought my way, I had what I thought was a high regard for Christ and His death on the cross and believed it was an essential part of my salvation, but ultimately, my trust or confidence that I was saved, was exposed to be in that which I presumed made the real difference – me doing my part – I believed in a god and in my own concept of a gospel whereas the lost would not. At that time my trust was in my believing – faith in my faith, not faith or trust in Christ and His finished work alone. And sad to say, many remain so deceived.

 3. In His Sermon on the Mount, Christ was describing these same poor and afflicted people as He spoke of those blessed with eternal salvation. In Matthew 5, verses 3-5 we read: ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”*** Under this pure language of grace, we discover that we are indeed poor in spirit, poor and afflicted, made meek so as to repent of our religious pride as we see that we have nothing acceptable to offer unto God as sinners. So we come to understand our desperate need of Christ and His righteousness, in whose name we then place our trust. And then in the 1st part of verse 13 we see another characteristic of those who are saved in that (4) Righteousness is truly made to be theirs...
- E. Verse 13a, Righteousness Made Theirs: ... as we read, ***“The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth:...”***
1. In the immediate context, ***“The remnant of Israel”*** would seem to be speaking of God’s chosen people unto eternal salvation out of the nation Israel. But as with the rest of our passage today, these descriptions can likewise be applied to all those chosen unto eternal salvation, those called in the Bible “the Israel of God,” chosen from among all nations.

2. So what is said here is true of all those to whom God graciously turns to with this pure language of grace. And it says of these that they shall “...***not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth:...***” We know from the whole of scripture that this does not mean that they will live the rest of their lives without sin. Those who plead the offering of Christ’s redemption, to whom this revelation of grace is given, who experience a reversal in Judgment and in where they place their trust – they are still sinners, but sinners saved by grace. So some believe that this means they don’t persist in their sinning as the tenor of their life. But I think that when it says that they shall “***not do iniquity***” it may be (1) in reference to their standing in Christ – having His perfect righteousness and so without sin in Him, their Representative.
3. But I think it is conveying that (2) they shall “not do iniquity” as they did before the pure language of the Gospel was heard and believed upon by God-given faith. As we’ve seen, the saved come to experience a radical change in how they judge saved and lost. Their plea and hope for salvation is now in Christ alone, based upon His perfect righteousness imputed to them – a righteousness which does measure up, which is equitable. They repent from having sinfully expected to be saved based upon something that proceeds from the sinner, that which could not possibly measure up to the perfect righteousness required. They see that was inequitable. That was iniquity.
4. So now they don’t speak lies nor have a deceitful tongue. I think the context suggests this to be doctrinal lies – deceptions pertaining to the subject to which these verses address – eternal salvation. The way, the profession, the gospel of all true believers is no longer a false one in which they were deceived. They have received the pure language of grace that sets forth the true way of salvation – God’s Gospel. So in their believing the pure language of the Gospel – in that sense they no longer speak lies so as to deceive themselves or others concerning the one basis upon which God can and does save sinners. And again, the latter part of this verse supports this understanding as it speaks of the ...

F. Verse 13b, Rest for those who are saved: Verse 13 reads, “***The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.***”

1. They will feed upon God’s word, the truth – trusting now in salvation His way, having been enlightened by the pure language of grace, no longer deceived,
2. They are at rest in Christ their Savior so they lie down, they stop trying to be saved by their own efforts and rest in Christ – just as Christ rested by sitting down at the Father’s right hand, having finished by His death on the cross the work of righteousness on their behalf. They rest in Him!

IV. Conclusion:

Well today we've seen a description from God (through His Prophet Zephaniah) of that which all the saved come to experience by God-given faith. I hope it describes you. It begins with the hearing of this pure language – the very Gospel of God's grace that has been brought your way this morning.

I pray that by God's grace that all who hear this message might be able to identify with the eternally blessed as described here for us in God's word – praying that you too might call upon the name of the Lord, pleading Christ and His offering, His righteousness as your only hope, having embracing the doctrine of Christ, God's Gospel – “The Pure Language of Grace!”

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.