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More Divine Marching Orders — Part 5

Years ago, C. S. Lewis coined the expression, “Shadow Lands” to describe the world in which we live. And he got it right!

Colossians 2:16-17, “Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day- things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

Truly, this world is not our final destination. What we are and experience here is as the shadow

in comparison to the substance that awaits us in Christ. Consider the worship we offer. For example Hebrews speaks of the Levitical priesthood and their service:

Hebrews 8:5, "...serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things..."

The Tabernacle and Temple were but a shadow of the heavenly one after which they were patterned! And though we are in the New Covenant, that truth hasn't changed! Such also could be said of the word, "law".

Hebrews 10:1, "...a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things..."

Now in the context of this passage, Christ is said to be the fullness of the Law. But this is my question, "Do we know Christ fully today?" Brothers and sisters! There is so much more to come. Truly this is *The Shadow Lands*! We know in part! But when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away! In fact, such can be said even when it comes to trials, difficulty, suffering, and death. David wrote this in the Psalms:

Psalms 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me..."

Now all of this is NOT to say that the life we live today and the things we experience aren't real; of course they are. BUT when we "stand in glory, looking o'er Christ's finished story" as glorified saints in a perfect world, all that we experienced and knew in this life will seem as a shadow in comparison to what we will then have in Christ! Truly, God's plan goes way beyond life in this current age. We were saved for an existence NOT of this fallen world. And it behooves us to set our focus there in this life!

Colossians 3:1-4, "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

This is the message Zephaniah gave to the genuine servant of Christ in his day! This book was written around 622 BC, at what would prove to be a temporary lull in the trials and persecutions that faced the nation of Judah at this time. In fact, it wouldn't be but thirteen more years and Judah would face the beginning of their end! As such, Zephaniah came to the temple mount and proclaimed a dire warning to the people of God: judgment was coming! Yet

again you must see that God would not and did not abandon the genuine servant. Though they were going to go through the horrible days predicted by Zephaniah, nevertheless the Lord gave them instruction and encouragements that they might, in the words of David, “...fear Him and so know no want” (Psalm 34:9)!

Thus far we have seen two words of exhortation that God gave the genuine servant facing the valley of the shadow of death: Seek (Zephaniah 2:3) and Wait (Zephaniah 3:8). Now, consider with me the final word of exhortation that Zephaniah gave to the genuine servant of God: “Worship!”

Worship

Zephaniah 3:14, “Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all *your* heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!”

The words utilized in this verse are all worship-related exhortations- notice they are given in two exhortative-couplets. The first couplet is “shout for joy.” This is purely a Hebrew word developed by God’s people for worship. Hebrew, like any other language, borrowed many of their words from their cultural ancestors and neighbors. As such, there is much cross-over in ancient Semitic languages. Yet not here, not with this word! The primary thrust of the word is jubilation which was expressed equally either in shouting, chanting, or in singing. The word is used frequently in the Psalms and typically appears in the first position of a pair of words exhorting God’s people unto worship and praise (as it is here). In the Psalter it parallels nearly every term for “joy,” “rejoicing” and “praise” indicating decisively that the highest mood of Old Testament religion was that of joy. Notice the next word which intensifies the call.

The second couplet is “shout in triumph.” With “shout for joy”, this word in ancient times also was unique to the Hebrew language; which again reflects the fact that God’s people had to create a language for the worship of the only wise God, and this is one of those fabricated words! The primary meaning is “to raise a noise” either by shouting or with an instrument- most typically the horn (Numbers 10:7) or the “shofar” (Joshua 6:5). In fact, it was this word that was used to describe the people’s praise and exultation when:

- The Ark of the Covenant was brought to the camp.
- David brought the ark to Jerusalem.

Now brothers and sisters, God is a victorious warrior! And so it should not be a surprise that this word was utilized when Israel’s armies were called to battle (e.g., Numbers 10:7; Joshua 6:10)! With this usage the lines between the worship of God and the conquest of God in battle are blurred:

- In worship, we praise God for His victories as King!
- In battle, our service is as an offering of worship!

With that we are brought to the second couplet exhorting God's people to worship the Lord. "Rejoice" denotes being glad or joyful with the whole disposition, and so advances the thought from what we do to what we ought to be. The idea here is of a "joy expressed" or a "bubbling over joy." It is the result of knowing/being convinced that all is well!

The phrase "exult with all your heart" describes an emotion of joy which finds expression in singing and shouting. In fact, it is even used of God (Psalms 60:6; 108:7)! As we compare the words, to "rejoice" is to act upon the conviction that all is well. To "exult" is to allow this conviction to overwhelm us unto shouts of joy and exultations of praise.

This is the third call that God gave His people as they faced the extinction of both their nation and their lives as they knew it. They were called to worship, to allow their joy to overwhelm them into shouts of praise and adoration! Now from purely a human perspective, the call here seems so out of place.

- Someone has just died... one's world has been turned upside down... a way of living has ceased and they are called to rejoice?
- How cold! How out of place! There is "a time for weeping and mourning" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Is this a reversal of that statement?

Absolutely not! In fact as we saw in Jeremiah, God's people would be warranted many times over to cry and mourn over the fall of Jerusalem and their difficult plight! Rather, the idea here is to mourn/grieve IN HOPE (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13)! In fact, this no doubt is where Paul got the idea as he exhorted God's people who had lost loved ones in 1 Thessalonians. Death is no laughing matter. But to ones who know that God has gained the victory over death, there is joy in the midst of grief, for we shall see our loved ones again! In fact, from the perspective of the loved one, there is exultation and celebration over what they now have in Christ. Let me ask you this: What do you do at a graduation or a wedding? You celebrate! But what if that graduation/wedding is your child who soon will be leaving home and going away to college or a new life? There is a celebration mixed with sorrow; is there not?

Redemptive history is filled with graduation announcements in which God's people move from one facet of God's redemptive plan to the next! It was with our ultimate graduation in mind that Zephaniah penned this third exhortation to God's people who were facing death on multiple levels! What were they to do? Worship!

Now this still seems hard to take in until we see the vantage point of Zephaniah when he wrote these words. Before him was a view which God's people could NOT see at that time as they entered into the valley of the Shadow of Death. It had four incredible vistas! Notice the first "vista" is that in the land for which we have been saved, there is no disaster.

Zephaniah 3:15, "The Lord has taken away *His* judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you will fear disaster no more."

Zephaniah utilized here the prophetic tool of *Synonymous Parallelism* in which he says the same thing three different ways; each time advancing our understanding. Let's consider them.

- “The Lord has taken away *His* judgments [or punishments] against you.” This is incredible. Yes, the nation was going to be judged on account of its infidelity. But God's individual people must see that God's coming temporal judgments were not intended for them. Because of the Messiah, God's judgments/punishments had been removed! God's people, in the midst of the trial, were well-pleasing to their Lord!
- “He has cleared away your enemies.” Temporally, this no doubt had the Babylonians in mind. Zephaniah gazed shortly down the corridors of time and saw that in less than 100 years, the nation of Babylon also would be gone, just as Jeremiah prophesied (Jeremiah 25:12ff). Yet based on the context, we know Zephaniah had a greater “enemy” in mind.

1 Corinthians 15:51-54, “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”

Do you understand that in the future, one of our greatest enemies- death- will once and for all be vanquished?! No more partings... no more goodbyes... no more decay... no more of the vile consequences of age! And yet, there's more as we read in Revelation:

Revelation 20:7-10, “And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city [just as Satan had done many, many times before- but this time, it will be different...], and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

This is where God is bringing all things in this world! And as such, it is this victory that must ever and always remain in our minds as God brings to pass His providences in our lives. Are you in distress today? Are you weak and heavy laden? Of late have you only tasted of the bitterness of life? Know that in and through all things, God is bringing about THE victory in Christ! And it is our call and privilege to live in light of this victory today! Notice the third statement...

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you will fear disaster no more. What is the name

of Christ? Immanuel! Immanuel translated means, "God with us!" What were Christ's last words as He commissioned His church? "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

Understand that this is the culmination of God's redemptive work. When Adam fell and God promised restoration (Genesis 3:15). This is what God had in mind! When you come to see this glorious "vista" which resides at the end of our lives and this world, you too in trial and difficulty will "shout in joy and triumph, rejoicing and exulting with all your heart!" For you will be looking for a kingdom whose founder and builder is not of this world (Hebrews 11:13-16)!

The second vista is that in the land for which we have been saved there is no despair.

Zephaniah 3:16a, "In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: 'Do not be afraid, O Zion; do not let your hands fall limp....'"

Again, what a cold statement in light of the fate that awaited Jerusalem both in 586 BC as well as 70 AD! In less than forty years, Jerusalem would be razed to the ground, the temple destroyed! And in roughly 700 years, Jerusalem once again would be razed with thousands upon thousands of crosses on which the corpses of God's people would hang surrounding it. So what "day" is being referenced here? And what "Jerusalem" must this passage have in mind? The Jews prided themselves that they were descendants of Abraham. Yet Paul raised a very important question:

Galatians 4:24, "By which woman- Sarah or Hagar?"

Paul didn't dispute the Abrahamic lineage of his countrymen. But the question he raised was, "Spiritually, from which woman did you come?" Notice how Paul answered that question:

Galatians 4:25-26, "This is allegorically speaking: for these *women* are two covenants, one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother."

Clearly from the perspective of Scripture, "Jerusalem" was a physical city which would be destroyed time and time again. Yet it also was a title for the genuine people of God assembled together into a covenant community. That is what we have become in Christ; a "new Jerusalem"! And what plans God has for this "new Jerusalem"!

Revelation 21:2, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."

Now no doubt referencing this "New Jerusalem" Zephaniah continued:

Zephaniah 3:16b-17, "...the Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will

exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”

O. Palmer Robertson wrote of Zephaniah:

One of the most awesome descriptions of the wrath of God in judgment found anywhere in Scripture appears in the opening verses of Zephaniah. The totality of the cosmos shall be consumed in his burning anger. The very order of creation shall be overturned. [Yet] one of the most moving descriptions of the love of God for his people found anywhere in Scripture appears in the closing verses of Zephaniah. God and his people attain heights in the ecstasy of love that are hard to comprehend. (Robertson 1990 , 334 emphasis added)

Consider what it says: as our “Victorious Warrior,” what will God do? We read another example of *Synonymous Parallelism*-, the John 3:16 of the Old Testament:

Zephaniah 3:16, “He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”

The battle cry on the Day of Judgment... will be replaced by the poignant hush of the reuniting of two lovers. (Baker 2009, 118)

That Almighty God should derive delight from his own creation is significant in itself. But that the Holy One should experience ecstasy over the sinner is incomprehensible! There is no explanation that I can give that furthers what is translated and placed before you in the word. To the child of God facing a difficult road and wondering whether God loves them, listen both to your position AND to God’s practice as it relates to you.

Zephaniah 3:16, “He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy>”

This is what we have become in Christ and what will be enjoyed fully when Christ returns and establishes His reign and rule over the entire world (Revelation 11:15)! Truly when you come to see this glorious “vista” which resides at the end of our lives and this world, you too will “shout in joy and triumph, rejoicing and exulting with all your heart!” That brings us to a third “vista” that in the land for which we have been saved there is no shame.

Zephaniah 3:18, “I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts- they came from you, *O Zion*; *the reproach of exile* is a burden on them.”

I love this! The people being spoken about here are NOT grieved NOR were they shocked at the horror that soon was coming upon them. NO! Their burden was and remained the compromise in which God’s people currently engaged and the shame that this compromise would bring on both them and their Lord! That is what is behind the statements.

- Those who grieve about the appointed feasts... the reproach of exile is a burden on them.
- To these dear saints, temporal comfort and prosperity were of little consequence. What mattered was the health of the people of God and the glory of the Lord! Compromise their health, property, future and all will be well for God was on the throne. But bring dishonor to their Lord and they will “grieve”! Well to these dear saints of old, what was the consolation God gave them?

Zephaniah 3:19, “Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors, I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.”

The consolation is twofold. First all accomplices in the compromise of God’s worship and service will be “dealt with.” If they are Christians, they’ll be disciplined. If they are deceivers or pagans, they will be destroyed! Secondly, the “lame” and “outcast” will be gathered together in the arms of God who will then *transform their shame into praise and renown!*

This is exactly what God did with Ebenezer. Ebenezer was a city during the early days of Samuel at which a battle was fought and the ark was captured! It is recorded for us in 1 Samuel.

1 Samuel 4:1-2, “Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped beside Ebenezer while the Philistines camped in Aphek. And the Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines who killed about four thousand men on the battlefield.”

Believing that “no army could ever be defeated that was led into battle with the Ark of the Covenant at its head,” God’s people took the Ark the next day and went to war. This would be like you and me taking the bread of communion into a battle believing that the bread would protect us. Not surprisingly, God’s people were destroyed and countless thousands died. God would not be mocked.

Now you talk about shame! The Ark of the Covenant was sacramental and a vehicle that God gave to His people that together they might fellowship. Yet God’s people lost this at the *Massacre of Ebenezer!* From this point on, “Ebenezer” would be synonymous with shame! Yet God turned his people shame to rejoicing.

After many years of struggling as the door mat of the Philistines, God’s people assembled themselves together to confess their sin and worship the Lord. They were finally humbled! Yet at this moment the Philistines decided that this would be the perfect time to attack Israel and so shame them even more. Yet, God would not allow it. Rather, He sent his weak and frightened people into battle, and the strong army of the Philistines was routed between Mizpah and Shen!

1 Samuel 7:12-13, “Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and

named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.' So the Philistines were subdued and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel."

Do you understand what God did here through Samuel? He took Israel's greatest shame and made it their greatest victory! The mentioning of the name "Ebenezer" now would elicit praise!

That is how God works with our weakness and shame! He doesn't ignore them or act like they never existed. Rather, He transforms them into a platform of praise! This is the third "Vista" Zephaniah beheld as he considered God's plan for His people.

Zephaniah 3:19, "Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors, I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth."

In light of this, truly the genuine servant of Christ could rejoice and would rejoice. Notice the final "vista" with which Zephaniah encouraged God's people that in the land for which we have been saved there is only victory.

Zephaniah 3:20, "'At that time I will bring you in, even at the time when I gather you together; indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,' says the Lord."

The emphasis is on the "restoration of the people's fortunes before [their] eyes." In the short term this referenced the restoration of God's people to the land which would occur seventy years after the first exile. However, at that time, God's people did not receive "renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth." Furthermore, notice that God made a promise here to Zephaniah's generation. It would be "before their eyes" their renown and praise would be restored.

You must see that the only way for God to make good on His promise here would be to resurrect the genuine child of God in Zephaniah's day, renew the earth, and place them in it! And that is exactly what God is going to do- not only for them, but for us as well! O. Palmer Robertson put it this way:

[E]mbedded in the words of the Voice from the bush to Moses was the promise of resurrection. If he still was Abraham's God hundreds of years after the patriarch's death, then resurrection is a necessity. For he is not a God of the dead but of the living (cf. Mark 12:18-27). In Moses' day promises made personally to Abraham were still outstanding concerning the patriarch's own possession of the land. ¶ Before the eyes of Zephaniah's contemporaries, says Yahweh, the unchanging I AM's return to paradise shall occur. As in the case of another patriarchal figure, they shall see this rejuvenation with their own eyes, and not through the eyes of a stranger (Job 19:25-27). (Robertson 1990 , 346-347)

This is where we are headed! This is the Telos/the end for which and to which all things are moving! Today we may know shame, grief, sadness, want, and inability. Tomorrow, when heaven dawns, we shall be resurrected and placed on a renewed earth which then will be a paradise- and we shall always be with the Lord!

What impact ought this to have on our lives today? It should drive us to our knees in worship! In the words of Zephaniah, it should make us, "...shout for joy... shout *in triumph*... rejoice and exult with all *your heart*..."! That was and is the third word of exhortation given to a people facing the Valley of the Shadow of Death!!!

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About the Preacher

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