

be looking this evening at Zephaniah chapter two, verses one through three. Now, if I told you that a category five hurricane was barreling toward Yazoo city and was going to hit tonight, you would have an immediate response to that information. You would begin to react right now. You would begin to try to figure out where you need to go and how quickly you can get out of this city. You might try to grab a few belongings, but your concern would be, I need to get out of this place. This great hurricane is coming this very night.

Well, that is what Zephaniah chapter one has been doing. He's been telling you that there's a terrifying day coming. It's a day of God's judgment. And he stressed that all throughout Zephaniah chapter one. And now. In Zephaniah chapter two verses one through three, we see what ought to be the necessary response to the reality that this terrifying day is in fact coming. Just as you would respond in a serious and even perhaps a drastic manner if you believe there was a great hurricane coming this evening, so Zephaniah chapter one has been saying this day is coming. Zephaniah chapter 2 verses 1 through 3 says this is how you must respond to the fact that this terrifying day is coming.

With this in mind, let us pray and ask God to bless the reading and the preaching of his word. Beloved Heavenly Father, we praise you that you were pleased to open up the eyes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. When the word was expounded to them, their hearts burned. We pray for burning hearts as we hear your truth faithfully by your grace expounded upon this evening and read in this portion of your word. Send forth your spirit, for apart from him we can indeed do nothing. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Hear now the word of God, Zephaniah chapter two, verses one through three. Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, before the decree takes effect, before the day passes away like chaff, before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the Lord. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands, seek righteousness, seek humility, perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord.

Well, thus ends the reading of God's holy word. May he bless the reading and now the preaching of it to our lives.

Well, every worker needs his tools. The farmer needs his tractor. The student needs his textbook. Every worker needs his tools. And it makes a big difference if you have the right tools for the job. If you're trying to nail in a screw, it's going to be very hard. Instead of using a hammer, you need to use a screwdriver or a drill. Having the right tool for the job makes a big difference.

Well, tonight, we have a job. And the job, according to the text, is this. The job is repentance. That's what the text is calling you to this evening. The text is calling you to repentance. But God, in his mercy, doesn't just give you the job. He gives you the tools for the job, so that you're not just in these words from Zephaniah 2, verses 1 through 3. You're not just told what you need to do. They're actually given the right tools so that you might be able to do it.

Every Christian knows that they need to repent, that they need to be growing in grace daily. But what are the tools for repentance? And that is what we get to see in Zephaniah chapter two, verses one through three, the tools for repentance. So that's what we'll be looking at tonight, tools for repentance. And God gives us three tools here in our

text. First, assess yourself. Second, assess the times. And third, seek the Lord. So assess yourself, assess the times, and seek the Lord.

So first this evening, the first tool for repentance, assess yourself. You see this in verse one, we read here, gather together. Yes, gather, oh shameless nation. This is a command. God is ordering the nation that is Jerusalem and Judah. He is ordering them to gather together.

But this word, translated gather together in our text, it's used twice. This particular word is elsewhere used in the Old Testament only for gathering together sticks and stubble and straw. So let me give you a few examples of the actually the only examples of the other time this word gather together is used in the Old Testament. This word gather together is used in Exodus chapter five when Pharaoh orders the Egyptians to gather together straw to make the bricks. This word is used in Numbers chapter 15 when the man was gathering together sticks on the Sabbath. This word gather together is used to describe how the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17 was gathering together sticks on the day when Elijah met her. And these are the only other examples of this word used twice in verse one. These are the only other examples of it being used in the entire Old Testament. Every single time it was used, it was used for gathering together straw, stubble, and sticks.

Why do we make this observation? Well, Opalma Robertson translates the verse like this to try to capture the point. Gather yourselves together like stubble. Yes, gather together like stubble, O nation that has no shame.

Well, why draw out this point? Because Zephaniah chapter two, verse one is saying to the nation of Judah, gather yourself together like the stubble that you are. He is saying, wake up. He is saying to Judah, stop fooling yourself. Stop pretending like you're something great and grand and glorious when you are but stubble and sticks and straw before my great fire and flame on the day of judgment. He is saying, assess yourself rightly. See who you really are, oh Judah. Look in the mirror and acknowledge that you are nothing. That's what he wants them to do.

This is a priority in any true repentance. Either man will assess himself as worthless and in need of Jesus Christ alone for his salvation, and therefore he will repent and he will go to Jesus Christ, or a man will assess himself as at least moderately decent. At which point he will not repent and he will not come to the Lord Jesus Christ alone for his salvation because he's convinced himself that he's at least moderately decent. Moderately decent is not enough. You have to acknowledge that you're far less than this, that you are stubble. before the God before whom you must give an account.

And what does he go on to say in our text in verse one? He says of them, O shameless nation. These people have no shame, according to verse one. And why do they have no shame? Is it because they have done nothing worthy of being ashamed? Do they not have shame because they don't have sins for which they ought to be ashamed? No. The reason they are ashamed, or not ashamed, is because they've forgotten how to blush. They've forgotten how to be ashamed of their sin.

Turn with me, if you will, for a moment to Jeremiah 6, verse 12. Jeremiah 6, verse 12. Jeremiah 6, verse 12 says this. Their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields and wives together. Actually, rather, it should be verse 15. Look down at verse 15. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed.

They did not know how to blush. Therefore, They shall fall among those who fall at the time that I punish them. They shall be overthrown, says the Lord.

And look at chapter eight of Jeremiah. Chapter eight, verse 12. Chapter 8, verse 12, were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed. They did not know how to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among the fallen. When I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord.

You see, the Christian knows that he is a sinner, but the Christian does not glory in his sin. The Christian is ashamed of his sin. Now, typically, people will have one of two responses to the reality that they are a sinner. And both of these responses are anti-Christian. One response, which is sometimes thought to be a Christian response, and it is not, is to boast of their sin. That's anti-Christian. Another response is to deny your sin. That is also anti-Christian. You are not to boast of your sin, and you also are not to deny your sin.

If you boast of your sin, this is pride because you don't even care that you're sinning against the God who is holy and amazing and glorious, the only God in existence, the one who didn't spare his own son but gave him up for your redemption, and you don't think sin is a serious offense. and you're sinning against him, that's pride to boast of your sin. But it is also pride, an anti-Christian, to deny your sin because you're not even willing to acknowledge what you really know to be true deep down, which is that you are a sinner and that you are guilty of your sins.

But the Christian does neither of these things. The Christian does not boast of his sin, but neither does the Christian deny his sin. The Christian in honest humility before the God who created him and the God who loves him and did not spare his own son for him, the Christian owns his sin. He owns it. He acknowledges it. He goes before his heavenly father and he confesses his sin. in humble reliance upon the work of Jesus Christ alone for his salvation. He does not boast of it, neither does he deny it, but he humbly owns it and confesses it to his heavenly Father.

Well, verse one gives you this first tool for repentance. It's to assess yourself. And you know, Paul calls himself the chief of sinners in the New Testament. And the apostle Paul also calls himself, in 2 Corinthians 12, verse 11, He says, I am nothing. So here's the apostle Paul. He gives himself these two descriptions. I am the chief of sinners. And another place he says, I am nothing. How could Paul say this of himself? How could Paul the apostle say, I am the chief of sinners and I am nothing.

He could say this of himself because he assessed himself rightly. He didn't mope in his sin. But he did take an honest account of who he was before God in himself, and he knew that he was nothing but a sinner saved by sovereign free grace. So one tool you see in the text for repentance is self-assessment. You must assess yourself not by comparing yourself with other people. You must assess yourself by comparing yourself to the inflexible law of God. And this is a key component to repentance. If you do not know that you need Christ, you will not repent and come to Christ.

Jesus said this, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. If you don't think you're physically sick, you're not going to go to the hospital. Why? Because you don't think you need the physician's help. And Jesus is saying the same thing, but spiritually. If

you don't believe you're spiritually sick, you will not go to the physician of your soul, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be healed. Why won't you? Because you don't think you need him. And this is one of the reasons that many people don't come to Christ. Because deep down, they actually think that they're at least good, good enough. they have actually convinced themselves that they're not spiritually sick, that they're not spiritually dead. And as a result, they will not come to Christ for their salvation.

But for other people, the exact opposite is the problem. The problem is not for some people, the problem is not that they think they're in no need of repentance. For some people, the problem is they think they have too much for which to repent. They think that they can't come to Christ because they think that they have too many sins, too much iniquity, too great of transgressions. And so those people also will not come to Christ. Not because they think they don't need to repent, but because they think they have too much for which they need to repent.

And let me ask you this question. If that's you here this evening, if that's one of your friends or your relatives that you've tried to share the gospel with, let me ask you this question. And you can ask them this question. When do you want to go to the hospital more quickly? When you're barely sick or when you're deadly sick? When you're deadly sick. Why? Because you recognize how unbelievably desperately you need the help of the doctors for your body. The more sick you are, the quicker you go to the hospital. Why do you think that should be any different spiritually? Are you here tonight? and you have some deep, dark sins that you think are going to be a good reason for you not to go to Jesus, Jesus says to you that's all the more reason to come to Him. Jesus says, don't let your sins repel you from me, may your sins be used to propel you toward me. Come to him all the more quickly, all the more sincerely, because you see that you have sins for which you can't do anything to absolve yourself. But he can do everything to forgive you, everything to cleanse you. Go to Christ this evening with your sins. Repent. and come to Jesus.

But second tool for repentance is assess the time. Assess the times, verse two. This verse, verse two, proclaims that there is still time to repent, but there is not much time to repent. The call to repent is urgent in verse two, and you see that by this repeated use of the word before. Look again at verse two and For the sake of bringing out that which is found in the text, I'm going to read it with this word, repent, before each time we see the word before. Repent before the decree takes effect, before the day passes away like chaff. Repent before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord. Repent before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the Lord. He is saying over and over again in verse two, repent before it's too late. Someone might say, well, that's really an offensive message. It'd be offensive if we didn't tell you you need to repent. Because what I'm telling you this evening by the authority of God's word is that it's not too late. What I'm telling you is there's a cliff and we're all going to go over it unless we repent and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. I would be doing you no favor to withhold this truth because all I would be doing is telling you, no, you're fine. go over a cliff to eternal death. And so this message is one of urgency and one of hope because it's saying to you, it isn't too late. but one day it will be.

He calls this day a day of God's decree in verse two. And what are the decrees of God? The decrees of God are his eternal purpose according to the counsel of his will, whereby for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. What that means is, is this day is coming and it will not not come. It's coming with absolute certainty. Therefore, repent before it arrives.

He uses this word you, Y-O-U, twice in verse two. He says, before there comes upon you, and this is plural, the original, before it comes on y'all, the burning anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the anger

of the Lord. While it is plural, the sense is simply this, This is a real judgment that is personal. It's going to come upon all of you who do not repent and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what he is telling them with this you.

But one of the reasons sometimes people are unwilling to repent is because they say to themselves, and maybe this is somebody here this evening, but maybe it isn't, but I know this is some friend of yours somewhere, some family member. People will say to themselves, I will repent when I have all of my questions about God and about the Bible and about Jesus adequately answered to my liking, then I will repent.

And let me just say to you this, if you knew that a Category 5 hurricane was going to hit here tonight, and you were sure of it, the message was told to you, you would not waste your time trying to figure out all the particular details. You would get in your car and you would go, because it's urgent, and you know that eternity, or in this case, your earthly life, is at stake. You go now. You can figure out the details of the storm later, how exactly it developed, what particular moves or whatever it was making, but your job is to trust that it's coming and go. And that's what verse two is saying. It's saying, assess the times. Eternity is right around the corner. And so you need to repent today.

And the truth is this, for anyone who may have that sort of attitude of, I'll repent when all my questions are answered. And I feel, let me simply say this, if this is you, if this is a friend of yours, a family member, you can tell them, you can say to yourself, cause it's simply just the fact. There are good answers to all of your questions. They are out there. The answers are out there. But what you need to worry about first is coming to Christ. so that you can be saved and he can deal with your soul. And then read your Bible a couple hundred times throughout the rest of your life. Study the scriptures, have Bible studies, fellowship with the saints, but come to Christ. Your questions will be answered in time. And to whatever extent they don't adequately get answered today, the God who knows everything knows what he is doing. And if he's told you something in his word, you can trust him.

Thirdly this evening for repentance, the third tool he gives you is seek the Lord, verse three. Repentance is more than remorse for wrongdoing. Repentance includes seeking after the Lord according to verse three. And the call to seek the Lord is clear in the text. He uses this word seek three times in verse three And if you look back at chapter one, verse six, this was the very thing they had not been doing. Those who have turned back from following the Lord, who do not seek the Lord or inquire of him.

So they had previously not been seeking him, chapter one, verse six, and now Zephaniah is saying unto them, seek the Lord. And why does he urge them to seek the Lord? Because the Lord himself is the only place for refuge on the day of the Lord's wrath. The Lord himself is the refuge from the Lord's wrath. He is his own refuge. Go to him. We read in Nahum 1 7, the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. He knows those who take refuge in him. He is the refuge place.

Imagine here this evening you went seeking for A penny, remember those things, those little, they were worth one cent, they used to exist, they used to actually make them in the United States. They ceased. But you remember the penny. Imagine you went seeking for a penny. And you decided to go searching in your backyard for a penny on the ground somewhere in the yard, or you got out your ladder and you climbed up on your roof to go looking for a penny. It would not be likely if you decided to look in these places that you would in fact find a penny. probably would not find any pennies. Where might be a better place to go? Maybe go to your piggy bank or to your center console of your car or dig in your couches. That's where you would go to find a penny.

Well, in this text, as he's addressing them in verse three, it's all plural. He's talking to the whole covenant community. And where do you think you should go to seek the Lord? You should go where he's told you he will be, and he has told you he will be in corporate worship. That's where you should go to seek the Lord. So what does it look like to live in accordance with verse three? Come to morning worship. And if not as providentially hindered, sincerely make an effort to make it to evening worship because that's where God told you he's gonna be and he tells you to seek him. Don't you want to seek him? Don't you want to know him? It takes the work of the spirit. And at the same time, it isn't rocket science. go where he told you he would be. And guess who you'll find there? You'll find him. Just like if you were looking for a penny, you wouldn't go in all sorts of strange places. You would go where you know you're most probably going to find a penny. Well, You see that here in the way that he talks about seeking the Lord.

But after saying seek the Lord, notice what he goes on to say. He says in verse three, after saying seek the Lord, he says, seek righteousness, seek humility. Now, how can you honestly seek righteousness without running the risk of becoming proud? I think it's a real question. How can you sincerely make an honest effort to seek righteousness, to seek piety, to seek holiness of life without running the risk of becoming proud, without running the risk of becoming full of yourself or conceited or condescending towards those who just aren't as righteous as you? Judgmentalism, anger, bitterness towards those who just aren't as righteous as you. How can you sincerely seek righteousness as this text commands without running the risk of becoming proud? How can you stay humble in seeking righteousness? Well, friends, let me tell you how you can do it. You can seek righteousness with all of your heart without becoming in the least bit proud if you simply follow the order of seeking in the text. Seek the Lord. And when you're seeking the Lord, you can then, with all of your being, seek after righteousness. And you know what will never happen? You will never become proud. You will never become conceited or condescending. You will never have a judgmental and angry and bitter spirit towards others who just aren't as righteous as you.

Why? Because you've been seeking the Lord. And you realize that he is infinitely righteous and he is infinitely holy, and you're perpetually enamored with him and his glory, and you're contrasting your attempts at holiness and at righteousness and purity with his righteousness, and so you don't become proud, and so you don't become condescending and bitter and angry towards other people who just aren't as good as you. Why not? Because you realize that you've really only at your best day made a small, feeble step by God's grace in the true pursuit of righteousness because you're contrasting yourself with the Lord whom you are seeking. And as you're seeking him, you're constantly contrasting yourself with him in your pursuit of righteousness.

If you really try to seek to live a holy life and a righteous life apart from really seeking the Lord, you will inevitably become self-righteous. You will become proud. You will become conceited. and condescending, because you'll always be thinking you're better and grander than everyone else around you. But when you seek him, seeking the Lord, and you want the Lord, and you love the Lord, then you have freedom to sincerely pursue personal piety, personal righteousness, without ever running the risk of becoming full of yourself. Because you'll always go, well, I've made some strides, but I've made the smallest blip of progress compared to the great God whom I'm serving. He is the real righteous one. And I'm thankful for even a little bit of stride, a little bit of progress I have made in his mercy.

And he goes on here in verse three, perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord. The point is simply this, you need to be hidden. That's his point. You need to be hidden on the day of the Lord or you will perish.

And he's saying there's no hiding place other than in the Lord himself, so seek him. Come to him, he is the refuge, and outside of him there is no refuge.

But what does verse three have to say to you this evening who are trusting in Jesus, you who are following after Christ? Well, it's a call to ask yourself, what am I seeking? Verse three is a call to ask yourself, what am I seeking? Even as a believer, certainly you're called to seek many things in life. You are to seek financial security. You are called to seek good physical health. You are to seek good friendships. These are all very good things which you should seek. But the priority of verse three is that we seek the Lord. So this evening, what are you seeking? What are you longing for in your heart? Do you want to know Jesus better? Do you want to live more for Jesus and pursue righteousness in the way that you live? Do you want to be found on the great day of judgment as personally pure as you can possibly be? Not because your righteousness, let's be clear, your righteousness will gain you absolutely nothing on judgment day. Christ's righteousness is your only hope. Christ's righteousness alone. But that being said, you want to be found as personally righteous as you can be. You want to be as sanctified as you can when your bridegroom comes. That's not contradiction. It's simply wanting to be as pure as you can be when he arrives. Not so that you can gain something from him, but because you love him.

So this evening, do you want to seek personal righteousness so that you might be found at least a bit more lovely on that great day when your bridegroom returns? This text says that should be a longing of your heart as you repent of your sins.

Well, tonight we have looked at three tools for repentance. Assess yourself, assess the times, and seek the Lord. But I want to conclude by making one more remark in the light of this reality. You can assess yourself this evening, you can assess yourself, and you can assess the times, and you can seek the Lord, but what can wash away your sins? Can your self-assessment wash away your sins? If you assess yourself rigidly enough, if you assess yourself particularly enough, Well, will you ever assess yourself perfectly? Will you ever be able to account or recount all of the particular ways in which you have transgressed the law of God? Well, you can never assess yourself well enough. Only Christ can wash away your sins.

What about this call to repentance? Can you repent? well enough to wash away your sins, will you ever be able to repent perfectly? You need Jesus's blood for your repentance. Even your repentance will never be perfect enough. Your repentance cannot wash away your sins. You must repent to be saved. But only Jesus Christ's blood can actually wash away your sins. Will you ever be sincere enough in your repentance? No. The hymn writer puts it so well. Could my zeal, no respite, no. Could my tears forever flow. All for sin could not atone. Thou must save and thou alone. True repentance does not trust in itself for salvation. True repentance turns to the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Is that where you are looking this evening? Are you looking to Christ alone for your salvation this evening? If you are, praise the Lord. Keep looking to Jesus. He is the one. He's done it, friends. He's the one. And whenever you look anywhere else, whenever your eyes get away from Jesus, repent and turn back to him. His blood and his blood alone is what washes away our sins.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we praise you for these three tools that you have given to us in Zephaniah chapter two, verses one through three, for helping us to repent well. Father, we do pray that we would assess

ourselves rightly, that you would open up our eyes, Father, where we may not right now see a sin, but we are in a sin, but we simply are blind to it. Love us enough, Father, to pry open our eyes, to remove the scales that we might see it, and we might be thankful that you showed it to us, that we might repent and be even just a little bit more like our elder brother, Jesus. And oh, Father, help us to assess the times, to remember that we are on the precipice of eternity. And we don't often perhaps think that way, but it is true. And I pray that because of this, We would be ready to repent because we long to be as pure as is possible by your spirit before that great day arrives. I know, Father, we pray that we would seek you and your son by the power of your spirit, that we would seek the Lord in our lives, in our repentance. We would want to grow in following after Jesus. as we turn from our sins and strive by all the means of your appointment to follow after our great Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. Praise you that our hope is in Jesus, not in our repentance, but in the one who shed his blood for our sins. It's in Christ's name that we pray, amen.