

I'm going to go ahead and read this evening verses 14 through 20. However, our sermon will be specifically on verses 14 through 16. As I read this whole section though, I would love for you to just notice how there is almost this back and forth. The people of God singing at the start of the section and then God singing back to the people of God beginning in verse 17. It's a powerful passage.

Palmer Robertson says of verse 17, which we won't get to tonight, but he says it's the John 3.16 of the Old Testament. Well, last time we looked at the book of Zephaniah, we covered verses 9 through 14 of chapter 3.

There, in verses 9 through 14, we saw a shocking and full salvation. And you may remember what made the salvation so shocking at the start of verse 9. What was it that made it so shocking? It was that verse 9 seems to come out of nowhere. Verse 8 ends with this description that all the earth shall be consumed. Then verse 9 starts with this shocking proclamation, for at that time I will change the speech of the people to a pure speech. And we noted that the only explanation for how you get from the judgment and condemnation and wrath of verse 8 to the salvation of verse 9 is the sovereign free grace of God.

It was that I, I will change. That this salvation is shocking. And we also saw that it was full because as those verses carry on, you see that this salvation removes our pride and our shame. This salvation is, it gives us a place where we take refuge. It causes God's people to pursue holiness. And it makes us like sheep who spend our days in the presence of our good shepherd. It's a shocking and full salvation. But now this evening, we get to see how the saved respond to this shocking and full salvation. How do they respond to this shocking and full salvation? They respond with singing.

And that's what we'll look at this evening. With that in mind, let us pray and ask God to bless the reading and then the preaching of his word. Dear Heavenly Father, go forth now. Send your spirit upon us through your word and through your preacher this evening.

In the name of Jesus, amen. Hear now the word of God, Zephaniah chapter three, beginning in verse 14. Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O Israel. Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away the judgments against you. He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst. You shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, fear not, O Zion. Let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love. He will exalt over you with loud singing.

I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival so that you will no longer suffer reproach. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors, and I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time, I will bring you in. At that time, when I gather you together, for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth. When I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord. Amen. This ends the reading of God's word. May he bless the proclamation of it to us this evening.

Why do people typically sing? People typically sing to try to express some emotion that they don't believe they can adequately capture with normal speech. So, for example, if someone is extremely sad, they will often try to sing about their sadness to express their sorrow. Or if someone is happy, they will often try to sing about that happiness

to try to express their joy. When a person wants to express a deep emotion that goes beyond normal speech, they often will sing.

On our text this evening, we see the saved singing. We see the saved singing. And why is it in our text that the saved sing? Well, the saved in our text sing for three reasons. The saved sing because God takes away his judgment. Second, the saved sing because God clears away their enemies. And third, the saved sing because God is with them. So first this evening, the saved sing because God takes away his judgment.

You see this primarily at the start of verse 15, but to appreciate what is happening, we need to spend a moment examining verse 14 as well. So look again at verse 14 and notice how this verse describes the heart and soul with which the saved sing. Verse 14 reads, sing aloud, O daughter of Zion, shout, O Israel, rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. Notice that this singing in verse 14 is flowing from the very heart of the saved, that as the saved sing in verse 14, it isn't only with their lips, but it is from their very hearts, that their singing is certainly externally.

They are truly singing, but that this external singing is flowing from an internal disposition of their hearts. It is flowing from their very hearts. That is often why, you'll notice, from time to time, when I announce a hymn, I will say, let us sing with heart and soul. Because we need to not only be singing as the redeemed with our lips, we need to be singing from our very hearts.

There are four verbs in verse 14 to describe this singing. The four verbs are these, sing, shout, rejoice, and exalt. And these four verbs, sing, shout, rejoice, and exalt, are all commands. So the verse isn't just commanding them to sing, it is commanding them to sing loudly.

And it's not only commanding them to sing loudly, it is commanding them to sing loudly and rejoice and exalt. from their very hearts. This begs the question, what could demand, because these are commands, it is a demand, what could demand such unparalleled rejoicing and singing? And this is where verse 15 takes us. It answers that question.

Verse 15 begins with the words, the Lord has taken away the judgments against you. What are the judgments that have been taken away by the Lord? Well, this is a reference to God's wrath against sin that he has taken away for his people. For example, look back at verse eight of chapter three. That was the most recent place in the book of Zephaniah that this word judgment was used, and it is clearly used in the context of God's wrath. Look again at verse 8 of chapter 3. For the day when I rise up to seize the prey, for my decision, that's our word judgment, for my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger, for in the fire of my jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed.

So that word, my decision, my judgment, that's our word here. we come to verse 15 where we read, the Lord has taken away the judgments against you. This means that the wrath of God which we deserve for our sin, he is saying, has been taken away. But how can God justly take away the judgment that we deserve for our sins. How can God justly, if he is a just God, take away the judgment due to you for your sins?

How can that happen? It's what Romans chapter three tells us, right? How can he simultaneously be just and the justifier? Well, God does this by providing a substitute to die for his people in their place. And who is that substitute who can withstand the infinite wrath of God, the infinite Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ? He is the substitute.

Isaiah chapter 53 says, he was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his stripes, we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all. You see in those verses from Isaiah 53 how he is the substitute who takes upon himself the iniquity of his people, the transgressions of his people. He takes away the judgment against you.

And he does this, God does this, not by looking the other way as if you have not sinned, but by looking your sin in the face and crushing it in the person and work of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The bottom line is this, either you will pay the penalty for your sins or Christ will pay the penalty for your sins in your place. But there is no third option or other option. Every person will either die for his sin or Christ will die for his sin in his place. But don't you see how this truth demands singing and rejoicing? God takes away the judgment I deserve for my sins. How can I not rejoice when I know that is true for me?

Now I've heard it said before that if you go into a church service and they don't sing explicitly about the work of Christ on the cross, explicitly, than you're in the wrong church. There's a lot of truth in that. If you can go through a church service, especially multiple church services, there are more doctrines than just that in the Bible, let us be clear. But if you can go through multiple church services in a church where they don't sing explicitly about what Christ did on the cross, you may not be in a very good church.

We need to sing about these things. But secondly, the saved sing because God clears away their enemies. Look again at verse 15. He has cleared away your enemies. Who are your enemies? Your enemies, of course, include sin, the flesh, the devil, the world, your very own self, hell.

And he has cleared away your guilt and your power. and the guilt and the power of sin for you in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection, the guilt that our sins deserve has been dealt with. He has dealt with the guilt of your sin in the Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. But he also, through Jesus Christ and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit, has dealt with the power of your sin, such that sin no longer has dominion over you. You are not a slave to sin any longer.

As our catechism so helpfully puts it, how does Christ execute the office of a king? Christ executed the office of a king in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies. He clears away our enemies according to the text. He destroys them by his strength.

So next time you face a powerful temptation in your life, or next time you face crippling doubt in your life, remind yourself of who your God is. Your God clears away enemies. You serve a God who clears away your enemies. Can you clear them away? No. But can your God clear them away? Yes.

Turn with me briefly to Psalm 124. I'm gonna read Psalm 124 for us with little or no comment, but I hope that you can see how Psalm 124 is a great picture of how God clears away our enemies. And what a great encouragement that can be for us and our daily battles against sin and temptation. Psalm 124, hear this portion of God's word.

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, let Israel now say, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when people rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us up alive. When their anger was kindled against us, then the flood would have swept us away. The torrent would have gone over us. Then over us would have gone the raging waters.

Blessed be the Lord. who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Well, thirdly this evening, I want us to consider this reason to sing. The saved sing because God is with them. God is with them.

We see this at the end of verse 15, carrying on into verse 16. Verse 15, the end reads, the King of Israel, the Lord is in your midst. You shall never again fear evil. Now, who is the King of Israel according to this verse? Well, it's pretty obvious, not very tricky. The Lord, right? The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst.

It's Yahweh. Remember Yahweh? If you see the capital L-O-R-D in your Bible, that's Yahweh, the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. But do you remember what Nathanael says when he first meets Jesus in John chapter one, verse 49? Rabbi, you are the son of God.

You are the king of Israel. So according to John 1, verse 49, the king of Israel is Jesus. You are the king of Israel, Nathanael says. Jesus doesn't interrupt him and say, not so fast, that's actually Yahweh. He accepts that designation, you are the king of Israel. But in Zephaniah 115, Yahweh is the king of Israel. So who then I ask is the king of Israel?

And the answer, yes. Jesus is the king of Israel because Jesus is Yahweh. That's the point. Jesus is Yahweh. That is why Nathanael can call him the king of Israel and Jesus doesn't. refused to accept that designation because he is Yahweh. And who is Israel? Well, Israel is merely a reference for God's people. So here you see that the Lord Jesus Christ is the king of his people and he is Yahweh himself.

Now our text here in verse 15 goes on and says that this king of Israel is in your midst. Now, this language in your midst is used throughout the Bible, literally from Genesis to Revelation. But where do you see that Yahweh most profoundly is in the midst of his people?

John chapter one, verse 14, do you remember? The word became flesh and dwelt among us. And then do you remember what Isaiah the prophet said? He said that his name would be Emmanuel, which means God with us. And then do you remember what Matthew chapter one says about Jesus? That he is Emmanuel, God with us.

He has come into our very midst. So this King of Israel that is spoken of here in Zephaniah chapter three, verse 15, is the Lord Jesus Christ and he has come into our midst and he has redeemed us and he has saved us and he reigns over us and how can we not then rejoice and sing with loud singing and praises to him. That is why so many of our songs here at Second Presbyterian Church are full of Jesus because who else deserves the praises of our heart Like Jesus deserves the praises of our heart. He has redeemed us. He has saved his people from their sins. And as a result of his coming into our midst, look what we read at the end of verse 15.

You shall never again fear evil. And the reason isn't because there isn't a lot of evil around us. The reason you shall fear no evil is because God is with us. In yourself you should be terrified of evil but God is with you, you are not a slave to evil, you are not powerless against it.

Remember what 1 John 4 says, he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. And how should knowing that God is in your midst help you fight against sin? 16 tells you, look at the end of verse 16, let not your hands grow weak. He is saying don't grow weak, don't give up, don't stop fighting, don't throw down the towel. Why? Because God is on your side, don't grow weak.

So you wake up tomorrow morning, And if you're very honest with yourself, perhaps this happens to you tomorrow morning. I hope that it doesn't, but perhaps it will. You wake up tomorrow morning and you say, I don't really want to pray today, or at least at this moment. And I don't really want to read my Bible. And I'm not really sure that I want to keep fighting against sin and temptation because frankly, I'm worn down.

And so that's where you find yourself tomorrow. Or maybe it's Tuesday or maybe it's Wednesday afternoon, but you find yourself in that place. And I am telling you, if you're in Christ, that God is with you, according to these words. Therefore, since God is with you, don't give up. Don't stop fighting. Don't throw down the towel. You must keep up the good fight because God is with you.

Do you remember in Exodus chapter 3 when God starts to speak to Moses and tells Moses that he's going to go to Egypt and confront Pharaoh and that God through him is going to bring up his people out of the land of Egypt. Do you remember what Moses says to him? Now there's a couple of different times where they dialogue back and forth throughout three and four, but specifically this time in chapter three, Moses says this, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? God responds to Moses with these words, but I will be with you.

What is God's point? His point is, Moses, you're asking the wrong question. You're looking at yourself, Moses, and you're saying, who am I to take on a task like getting the people out of the land of Egypt against a great and mighty King Pharaoh? And God says, Moses, you're asking the wrong question. The question is, who is your God? Who am I?

If I indeed am your God, Moses, go forth with confidence. I will be with you. And that's essentially what we're seeing happen here in the end of verse 15 into 16, this concept of don't give up. Don't stop. Why? Are you weak? Of course you're weak. but I will be with you, and God is not weak.

Now, these are all reasons for which the saved sing loudly and rejoice. with glad exaltation from their very hearts in these verses. And all of these are not grounded primarily in circumstances you'll notice, but really all of these reasons to exalt, to praise, to sing, are really grounded in God and who he is, what he has done.

So what that means for us here this evening is wherever you are, whatever is going on in your life, you actually, if you're in Christ, have a reason to sing. Now you can sing through tears, right? Christianity, we're talking Friday morning at the men's prayer breakfast, is not Stoicism. We're not suggesting, I'm not suggesting, the Bible isn't suggesting that you don't shed tears.

But what I am saying, and what a text like this says to you, is there's always, in Christ, a reason to sing. God's judgments have been taken away. Your true and greatest enemies have been cleared away and God is with you. Will you remind yourself of these truths this week? They will give you a reason to sing. Sing to the Lord. Let us pray. Almighty God, we come before you and our joy and our delight is that you are our God. Oh Lord God, The sum and real heart of the Christian is that he gets to have you as his God, that he gets to know you and be in a right relationship with you.

And that, oh God, is something that sorrow and pain and difficulty cannot strip from us. Even our own transgressions can't take us out of your hands. And oh God, this week, perhaps even this night, we will face Someone will face, all of us at some point between now and next Sunday will face some temptation, some battle, and we won't want to fight it. But will we remember that you are with us and therefore we should fear no evil? That is our hope, that our God is great. greater even than our own sins and our own weaknesses. In Jesus's name I pray, amen.