

through 20. In God's providence, we're finishing two books in one day. Lord willing. Lord willing. We haven't finished yet. Zephaniah chapter 3, beginning in verse 18, we'll be looking at these final verses together. Last week in our sermon, we saw that God is not like you. God is not just God is not simply quantitatively bigger than us. God is qualitatively different than us. This is what theologians call God's being *sui generis*, which simply means that he's in a category all of his own. And things go really wrong when you think that God is like you.

And why do they go wrong? Well, because our love fluctuates up and down based on how people treat us. We might wish it were not so, but it is so. And it's also dangerous because we are sinners. So if we tend to think that God is like me, only bigger, then we tend to, in one way or another, make him a sinner. We are sinners. So we must remember that God is not like you.

When we think that he's like us, we say to ourselves, if I wouldn't save me, God wouldn't save me either. If I wouldn't rejoice over me, then God wouldn't rejoice over me. If I wouldn't love me, God wouldn't love me. If I wouldn't sing over me, God wouldn't sing over me. But what we saw in Zephaniah 3, 17 is that God is not like you. God does save his people. God does rejoice over his people. God does love his people. God does sing over his people. And today, Zephaniah is going to continue to build off of this.

We'll see. that in verses 18 through 20, as we see God, the gracious gatherer, God, the gracious gatherer. And with this in mind, let us pray now and ask him to bless the reading and preaching of his word. Oh Father, make the reading of your word effective to our hearts. Bless the preaching of it. Pour out thy spirit. Apart from him, indeed, we can do nothing. In Jesus's name we pray, amen.

This is the word of God, Zephaniah chapter three, beginning in verse 18. 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 and amen. May God bless the reading and now the preaching of his holy word to our lives.

While all gatherings are not alike, you can gather for a funeral, and you can gather for a wedding. These are both gatherings, but they're not alike. And the same is true when God gathers a people to himself. When God gathers a people to himself in scripture, not all of these gatherings are alike. Sometimes God gathers a people to himself to pour out his wrath upon them. And sometimes God gathers a people to himself that he might show them his grace.

In our text, we see this word gather one time in each of these three verses. Once in 18, once in 19, once in 20. And we've actually seen this word gather already in Zephaniah. We've seen it a few times, but most recently, we've seen it in Zephaniah 3 verse 8. Let us read that verse again.

Therefore, wait for me. declares the Lord, for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. 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. God has gathered in this book and it wasn't pretty. He gathered a people in 3 verse 8 to pour out his wrath upon them.

But what is the gathering we see this evening? Today, in verses 18 through 20, we see God the gracious gatherer. God the gracious gatherer. And we see three things in our text. We see, first, God gathers worshipers. Second, God gathers outcasts. And third, God gathers you. to make you renowned. God gathers you to make you renowned. Well, first then, God gathers worshipers. Verse 18, we read this, I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival so that you will no longer suffer reproach. In verse 18, we see that God gathers worshipers. Now, how do you see this in verse 18?

Let me tell you, when I first came to this text, I had an idea. And then I studied the text and I realized that I didn't understand the text. As it turns out, verse 18 is the hardest verse to translate in the entire book of Zephaniah. And as it turns out, there are many different understandings of the verse, and I had one, and I realized I just had it completely wrong.

While there are various interpretations, there is a wide consensus among Reformed scholars as to how this verse ought to be interpreted. And I believe that those Reformed scholars are correct in how they interpret verse 18. The majority Reformed view is that in verse 18, God is gathering worshipers, his worshipers, to himself. Now, how do you see that in verse 18? Let's just read the first half again.

I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival. Now, what does it mean for God to gather those who mourn for the festival? The picture is this. God's people, his faithful worshippers, are mourning because God is not being worshipped at the appropriate festivals. People are neglecting to gather for corporate worship. Or if they are gathering, they are gathering insincerely. And so what is happening with this remnant of the people of God is they are mourning over this. They are actually heartbroken. Can you imagine that? Heartbroken over the fact that God is not being worshipped. It actually matters to their hearts.

Now, what is some of the other biblical support for this interpretation? Well, of course, we know in the Old Testament that God's people were supposed to gather to publicly worship Him. We know that was supposed to happen. For example, in Deuteronomy 16 and 16, we learn that the males of Israel were to gather three times a year for specific feasts to worship God. But in Lamentations 1 verse 4 we read something very similar to what we've just read.

Here's what we read in Lamentations 1 4. The roads to Zion mourn for none come to the festival. Did you hear that? The roads of Zion mourn for none come to the festival. So what is that picture in Lamentations 1 4? It's of God's worshipers, his true worshipers, mourning over the fact that people are neglecting the worship of God.

And this is helpful for our interpretation of Zephaniah 3.18, because Lamentations was written probably just a few decades after this book.

So a similar timeframe. But even if people were still gathering, It's at least evident that they weren't gathering sincerely. Why can we say that's evident? Well, remember what we read back in chapter one, verse four through six of Zephaniah. We're going to see as I reread these verses that while there was still some worship happening, in large measure, it was happening without sincerity.

It was syncretism. Chapter 1, verse 4 through 6, I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priest along with the priests, those who bow down on the roof to the host of the heavens, those who bow down and swear to the Lord. So you see how they're doing both of those things?

They're bowing down on the roofs to the hosts of heavens, some sort of gods. not the true God, while they're also swearing to the Lord, and yet swear by Milcom, those who have turned back from following the Lord, who do not seek the Lord or inquire of him.

Why again in our verse, verse 18, are these worshipers so grieved? Well, they're grieved because they treasure the worship of God so much. that it actually grieves them that their treasure is not treasured by those around them. They treasure God and his worship so deeply that as they see it being neglected or insincerely approached, it actually grieves them. It reminded me of Revelation where we see two different times, you'll remember this perhaps, two different times we see John, remember he's tempted to bow down and worship an angel.

And what does the angel say to him? Worship God. It's as if the angel is brokenhearted that he would ever receive any worship that is not due to him because he knows that it's due to God. And he's saying to John, don't worship me, worship God. He's longing, the angels in heaven are longing to see God worshiped. And that's what you see happening here. These people are so longing that it grieves them to see it neglected. Perhaps you've had this experience.

You've read a book, maybe a quote in a book, maybe a verse in the Bible. And it's been such an impactful thing to you. It's been such a powerful experience in your life that you just can't help but tell at least one other person about it. You've got to tell them. Why? Because of the way that verse, that thing impacted you, the experience you had, that treasure that was so valuable to you, you can't bear to just hold onto it for yourself. You want someone else to share in it because it's so good. Well that is what is happening here.

They treasure the worship of God so much that it grieves them to know that all around them are all of these people who don't care about the worship of God. They're at best insincere and it seems in large measure altogether neglecting it. That is certainly how we should have our attitudes be about the worship of God. We should really love the worship of God. We should treasure God's worship such that we long to see others treasure it too. And we sing about this. We sing in that hymn, how sweet and awesome is the place that we long to see his churches full. But do we? Do I? Do you? Do you long to see his churches full? Because we long to see him worshiped.

You see this in the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember in John 2, 17, zeal for your house will consume me. What was it that consumed the Lord Jesus Christ? It was zeal that God would be worshipped. Remember in Luke, 19, when the Lord Jesus Christ mourns over Jerusalem. He mourned over Jerusalem because the people who had the external covenant promises of God weren't worshipping God. He was grieved over the lack of worship of God. And this should lead all of us to ask the searching question, do I long to see God worshiped? Do I really long to see his churches full?

What matters most to me? Temporal things or eternal things? Spiritual things or material things? John Flavel, and I'm going to paraphrase him here, but John Flavel comments on this verse and here's the gist of what he says. It's a bit more Puritan in the way he says it, but this is the gist of what he says. He says this. He says, we should have more sorrow over spiritual losses than material losses. We should have more sorrow over eternal losses than temporal losses.

What would it look like in your life if you had this disposition, if this was really the attitude of your heart? Well, Hunter really helpfully challenged us a few weeks ago in one of his sermons on Esther about our priorities and how that really reflects our hearts' desires. And what he was saying in that portion of the sermon was essentially this, how do we raise our kids? How do you raise your children? How do you raise your grandchildren insofar as that's your responsibility? How do we care for those around us? What is the priority?

Is it, in all honesty, is it, I wanna see you grow up to be a doctor, a lawyer, an athlete, attractive? Friends, that, in the grand scheme of things, doesn't matter. And I don't say that to be unkind. We can value those things. I know there's a place for those things, but could you say, I wanna see you worship God? I wanna see you be a Christian?

You know, when I was growing up, my dad would often say to me, he would say, his nickname for me was Rune Boy. He would say, Rune Boy, does the Rune Boy love his dad? I'd say, yes, Rune Boy loves his dad. Does the dad love his Rune Boy? Yes, the dad loves his Rune Boy. And he would say, When the rune boy grows up, is he going to love the Lord as God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his mind, and with all of his strength?"

And I would say, yes. And he would say, I am going to hold you to it. Now my father was not perfect, I can assure you of that, but he was a good father and I can tell you this with complete clear conscience, it was unbelievably obvious to me that what he wanted most in my life was that I would be a Christian, that I would worship God. And that is what you should be able to say, too. That should be what you want to see in your children, your grandchildren. Yes, Lord willing, they'll have a decent job. Yes, Lord willing, they'll be a fine athlete.

But that is so fleeting compared to the worship of God. Secondly, God gathers outcasts. Verse 19a, the first half of verse 19. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors and I will save the lame and gather the outcasts. We just saw that God gathers worshipers in verse 18 and that can certainly be a bit daunting when we feel our worship to be cold at times and not all that it ought to be so often. But what do these worshippers actually look like that he gathers? Well, they're called lame outcasts in verse 19.

Now, historically, Zephaniah was writing just a few decades before the Babylonian exile in 586 BC. That's a historical context for the book. Just a few decades before that exile in 586, it was on the horizon, it was coming. And you can imagine how encouraging verses like this would have been to those Israelites when they were reading them in exile.

So here you are at exile and you read verses like this and you say, God has told us that he will deal with our oppressors. God has told us he will save the outcasts and save the lame. And then you say to yourself in Babylonian exile, that's me. That's us. We are the outcasts. We are the lame. We are those who need saving.

He will rescue me from Babylon. He will deliver me back to the promised land. So while that is the immediate historical context of this book, there is application to us today. It teaches you that God saves those who walk with a limp. God saves those who walk with a limp.

Here in verse 19, it says that he will gather the outcasts, and the lame. Now the word lame here is only used four times in the Hebrew Bible. The first time it is used is back in the book of Genesis 32, when a man named Jacob wrestled with God. And you remember what happened with Jacob after he wrestled with God.

He became lame. He became limp. He walked the rest of his life with a limp. And why did God make him walk with a limp? So that every step he ever took for the rest of his life, he would be reminded, you can't do it and you must rely upon me. You walk with a limp, Jacob, you are weak. If you are to be saved, it will be me indeed who saves you. And so here too in our text, it is those who are outcasts, it is those who walk with a limp that God gathers together.

And he does this, it says, first by actually dealing with all your oppressors. That's how the verse begins. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. He destroys the oppressors so that he might deliver his people. And that's what he has done for his children today. He has dealt a death blow to the reigning power of sin in your life. God has dealt a death blow to your oppressor, sin and the evil one. How has he done this for you, Christian? Well, he's done this in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew chapter 11, we read this. Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them, and blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

I want to ask you a question based on this this evening. How do you walk? Do you walk with a limp? Do you know that you are weak, and therefore, you need to be careful? You need to be going to the Lord and asking for help. What do people with a limp do?

They know their limitations and they ask for help. They know their limitations, don't they? Because, well, they've got this limp. They don't try to prepare for a marathon. Why? Because they can't do it, because they have a limp. They realize they're limited and they have certain parameters. What does that look like spiritually? You know something of your need, and you operate accordingly. You operate with a limp.

You realize, I can't handle this. This thing is too much for me. This particular item, whatever it may be, inclines me towards wickedness. I've got this limp in my life, and if I try to pretend like I don't, what's going to happen? It's going to end up poorly for me.

Again, a person with a physical limp, if they don't operate, they try to pretend like they're fine, and they go on a jog, it's not going to end well for them. Why? Because they have a limp. And they have to operate within their limitations. So do we, the people of God, realize your limp, your need. You also need to always be asking for help. What do people with limps do? They ask for help a lot.

Again, just briefly, you know this, I suspect, but my father was in a wheelchair my whole life. I promise you, he had to ask for help a lot. He didn't quite walk, but if he did walk, it would have been a limp. But he had a limp, right? He had a limitation. And as a result, what was he doing? He had to ask for help, to brush his teeth, to eat food, to put on clothes. Everything he did, he did with a limp, physically.

So should we do spiritually. We can't do it. The text is saying he saves those who walk with a limp. Go to him and ask for help. When you don't, you're not doing yourself any good. That's how this applies to us. We must carry ourselves with humility, walking with a limp, seeing our limitations, and going in reliance upon God regularly for his help.

Then thirdly, God gathers you to make you renowned. God gathers you to make you renowned, verses 19b through 20. We read here, I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time, I will bring you in. At the 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.

Calvin notes that the restoration of the church in this verse is so full that it's really reminiscent of a resurrection. It's such a change from where they've been throughout the book. It's such a radical shift that it's really nothing short of resurrection power that could produce such a change.

It's been observed that the whole book of Zephaniah might well be summed up with the words from Matthew 23, whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. And that's really what we've been seeing throughout this book. It's that these people who were utterly low and destitute, and many of them do receive the wrath of God, but all of them deserved it. But that a remnant of this group of humble, war-beaten, battered people would be rescued, they would be healed, they would be exalted.

And that's what we've been seeing throughout the book. But notice that the text makes it clear that all of this change happens again because of God. It happens by God's working and in God's timing. You see that it happens by his working. I will change their shame into praise. You see at the start of verse 20 that it will happen in his timing. At that time, I will bring you in. So it all happens by God's working and in God's timing. But when did God actually do this for his people? Well, again, there is a historical context.

Most commentators agree that you see something of a microcosmic fulfillment of these verses when God's people return from Babylonian captivity. So they're in Babylonian captivity, then they are restored in God's timing, they are brought back to him, and to some extent, they're renowned and praised. But that being said, it seems like a stretch to suggest that, as verse 20 puts it, they were renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth. That seems beyond anything that historically took place when they returned. That they were renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth? I don't think this finds its ultimate fulfillment in the 530s when God's people returned from Babylonian captivity. When does such a public announcement and praise and renown for God's people take place?

Well, you might know, happens at the resurrection on the last day. Our catechism puts it like this, what benefits do believers receive from Christ at death? At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory shall be openly acknowledged, I love that, openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity. What application do these final verses, final verse or so, of Zephaniah 3 have for you today? Well, this word renowned that is used here is the same word that's translated name throughout the Bible so often. It's sometimes translated renowned as well or fame, but it's name.

And you see, for example, in Genesis 11, remember that story when there was the Tower of Babel, and what were the people doing in that story? Remember they were self-exalting. They were trying to make a name for themselves. They were in pride, exalting themselves, trying to make themselves great. And God, as you perhaps remember, comes and brings them a judgment.

But in the very next chapter, we read that God does give somebody a great name, but it's not somebody who tried to exalt himself. In chapter 12 of Genesis, we learn that God made Abraham a great name, made his name great. And what this is teaching you is that if in pride you try to exalt yourself, you will actually be judged, that you will actually you will actually destroy yourself at that very point. And what then is the application of this verse in Zephaniah?

Well, the call is simply this, do not try to make a name for yourself. Those who have a name worth having, have that name because God has made it for them. God makes his people renowned. People don't make themselves renowned. People make themselves children of God, or children of wrath, rather, like the rest of mankind. God makes a name renowned.

We live in a world where people are trying to make a name for themselves all the time. Social media, people are trying to make a name for themselves. But before we just look at how this is happening all around us, which it is all over social media, I mean, it's just very obvious, right? Just think of all the things people are putting on the internet, trying to make a name for themselves, make themselves great. But it also happens in our own hearts.

When the pastor, whether it's me or some other pastor, when his desire is to make the pulpit about his own name, his own agenda, his own ideas, his own personality, that is pride. And that's making a name for yourself, which is horrible. But it happens with the businessman who cares so much about success in the business world that he is not faithful to the Lord in his business because he's so driven by the wanting to have a name, wanting to be successful, wanting to be thought well of by the world. Having that car that if he just makes one more sale, he can purchase. Having that next thing. Trying to make a name for himself that he forfeits having a name that's really renowned. at God names.

It happens for the mother in the household who is a homemaker and she's so set on making her home right that she fails to make it to corporate worship. Happens with the high school student who's so determined to be an athlete that he doesn't read his Bible. In all these different ways, it's trying to make a name for yourself and neglecting what really matters most along the way. In eternity, think about this, in eternity, the names that will be renowned in large measure will not be the presidents. They will not be the kings.

They will be those whose names were graven on the hands of Jesus Christ. They will be those whose names are placed in his heart. They will be those who are raised up and seated with him in the heavenly places. Not many of those names will be praised or renowned in this life. but they will be praised and renowned in the life to come.

They will be the millions of little children who have died in infancy. They will be the countless stillborns. They will be the lame and the widows and the orphans. They will be the husband and father who goes to work and tries to be faithful to the Lord. It'll be the mother who tries to raise her kids and exercises simple devotion and love to Christ.

It'll be the elderly person who feels largely neglected and forgotten in this life, but who follows the Lord Jesus Christ. Those names will last far longer than all the rulers and all the people of this world who don't know Christ, no matter what sort of praise they might receive in this life. The renown won't often look like much in this life. but they will be renowned because they are loved by God. They will be renowned because their name is written with the blood of Christ in the book of life. Well, tonight we've seen God, the gracious gatherer. He gathers worshipers, he gathers outcasts, and he gathers you to make you renowned. And how can you believe that this is true this evening?

Because God gives his guarantee in the final three words of the book. says the Lord. You can know this is true for all who trust in Jesus because God says it is true. At the start of this book, he said that he would judge all who do not trust in him. And he meant what he said at the start of this book. And he means what he says at the end of this book, that he will gather and graciously care for all who do trust in him. He means what he says, and he does what he says.

Let us pray. Almighty God, the saints of the Lord Jesus Christ are lame. We, as we heard in Sunday school this morning, are lame in both feet. We walk with a limp, and when we try to walk without a limp, we deceive ourselves and we fall down. Father, we thank you that it pleases you to come to the lame, to come to the infants, to come to the little children, to come, O Lord, to the elderly who feel like their purpose in life is fading, that their value is insignificant. You come to many, O Lord, who appear to be nothing, and in fact, in some ways, are nothing, and you say, you are mine.

I will make your name praised. I will make you renowned. Oh Lord, we pray that we would believe this for thus says the Lord. Oh God, if you have spoken, we are to receive it as truth for it is. We pray for your help in this matter and your blessings upon us even as we go about the rest of this evening in the fellowship meal in the name of Jesus. Amen.