

"The God of the Old Testament is always angry. I prefer Jesus and the God of grace in the New Testament." That is an objection you have probably heard, and maybe you have even said yourself. It is a picture that most people have of the Bible. But it misses the point of the Bible. God's judgment and His grace are not against one another. And even in the minor prophets, that are stereotyped as being full of wrath, are actually filled with grace.

This series has been called Day of Wrath and Day of Hope. Because the day that Christ returns will be both. Throughout most of this book we have seen the day of wrath. But this morning I want you to see that it is also a day of hope.

Turn with me to Zephaniah 3

I. God's judgment leads to correction (v. 1-8).

Listen, God's judgment and discipline is not meant to hurt.

It is not vindictive.

It is not God wanting to make us pay or be cruel.

It is just and right.

But it is primarily trying to correct us.

It is meant for our good.

It is meant to teach us.

And it is meant to bring us back to God.

Verse 1, "Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city!"

Listen, the warning of woe is a call to correct your behavior.

It is the warning that something needs to change.

If change does not come, then judgment follows.

And this warning goes to the nation who is rebellious.

The nation that is rebelling against God.

The nation that is defiled by sin.

This is a city and place that should be holy.

It should be known for its justice.

But instead it has become a city full of oppression and hate.

Verse 2, **"She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord; she does not draw near to her God."**

There are four different corrections that God offers.

Four different ways that people are sinning.

First, the city is not listening to God's voice.

Obedience throughout the Bible is portrayed as listening.

It is hearing the voice of God, and then doing it.

God's Word, the Bible, the Law, the commandments.

They are not arbitrary rules.

They are the voice of God telling us what to do.

And they are ignoring His voice.

Second, they are not accepting the correction.

They hear the correction and then they are not making a change.

The Word of God is read and they don't obey it.

Prophets like Zephaniah come and speak to correct them.

And they do not listen.

They do not receive it.

They also do not trust God.

They act as if their security and trust can be found other places.

They may be trusting in military might.

They are trusting in chariots and horses.

They trust in their own power.

Maybe they are trusting in alliances with other wicked nations.

Instead of trusting God, they hope these other places can help.

And finally, they do not draw near to God.

There is no intentional closeness.

No desire to grow closer to God.

No intentional worship.

No prayerful seeking of God's face.

They are content to stay far from God's presence.

These are all things that need correction.

Verse 3, **"Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave nothing till the morning."**

The leaders all throughout God's people are failing.

The political officials are like roaring lions.

Like Satan, they are roving the land looking for people to devour.

The judicial system.

What should be the system of justice is full of wolves.

Instead of protecting the weak and enforcing God's justice, they only seek the fill their bellies and they cover up their own sins.

Verse 4, **"Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men; her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law."**

The prophets and religious leaders also need correction.

They are fickle.

They do not stand firm on God's Word.

They can be pushed this way and that.

They are treacherous and not faithful to God.

They profane what is holy.

They do not enforce and preach God's Word.

Instead, they butcher it.

They manipulate it for their own greed.

Verse 5, **"The Lord within her is righteous; he does no injustice; every morning he shows forth his justice; each dawn he does not fail; but the unjust knows no shame."**

Now, I want to point out that up until this point, Israel wouldn't realize this was about them.

Because if you look back, the identity of the city is unclear.

It is not stated exactly.

So, they would think this is talking about Babylon.

This is talking about Nineveh.

This must be talking about some of those pagan nations you have been mentioning.

This would be the moment they realize this is about them.

Because it finally mentions this city is where God has dwelled.
Which means Jerusalem and their nation.
They are like David who was ready to kill the man who stole a sheep.
Until he heard the prophet say, "You are that man."

They are the people who need correction and discipline.
And they should know better.
Because God has been in their very presence.
He has not been far off.
They cannot say they did not hear Him.
They cannot say they do not know what God is like.
They have seen and they should have known.

And they are reminded of who God is.
They are reminded of God's character.
Because beholding the character of God, should lead to correction.
Their lives need to be compared not to the pagan nations around them.
They need to be compared to God and His righteousness.
Because God is always righteous.
He is always just.
Every single day He does what is right.
He never fails.
But these unjust people have ever day.

Verse 6, **"I have cut off nations; their battlements are in ruins; I have laid waste their streets so that no one walks in them; their cities have been made desolate, without a man, without an inhabitant."**

This is God sending His judgment.
The people have not listened, so they are made desolate.
Those who do not repent face the consequences.
They think they can stand without God, so they face His wrath.
And it leaves them in ruins.

Verse 7, **"I said, 'Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then your dwelling would not be cut off according to all that I have appointed against you.' But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt."**

Again, God sends His judgment for correction.

It is not to enjoy the death of others.

It is so we see the consequences of sin and stop.

It is so we will correct our behavior.

God hopes that as we see Him judge others it makes us change our ways.

But Judah does not do that.

They just go deeper into sin.

And we can do the same thing.

We feel God's correction.

And instead of responding with repentance we double down.

We get angry and lash out at those who point out our sins.

Or we try to get better at hiding and disguising our sins so no one notices.

Verse 8, **"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."**

The day of correction is coming.

For those who accept discipline it will be correction.

For those who continue to refuse it, there are harsher consequences.

We should wait and prepare for the day.

For some of us, this means we do not have to take our own vengeance.

For some of us this means we do not have to worry about others sins.

For some of us this means we need to accept this correction soon.

For some of us this means we can be encouraged.

The fire is going to consume the world and all things.

But we have a choice for how we respond to the fire.

Some things will be burned up into dust and ash in the fire.
Some things will be refined.
God's judgment can either lead to our eternal condemnation.
Or His judgment can lead to our correction.

Here is what that looks like.
It looks like repenting from our sins.
When we read last week that we are to be humble, correction means increasing our humility this week.
When we listen to preaching.
When we read the Word of God.
When we are rebuked.
When we are convicted of our sin.
When the Holy Spirit points out areas of our lives that need correction.
Then we need to accept that correction.
We need to not get defensive or argue.
We need to receive it and then change through the power of the Holy Spirit.
God does not offer judgment and tell us what is wrong to make us feel bad.
He does it to correct us and help us.
Because He wants what is best for our souls and for our good.
Correction is good for you.
This is why God disciplines those that He loves.

Once, I was driving faster than I should have been because I wasn't paying attention on my way home.
And a police officer was sitting on the side of the road looking for people speeding.
As soon as I saw him, he turned on his lights.
But he didn't turn on the siren or come pull me over.
He just flashed the lights as a warning of woe.
It was an offer to correct my driving behavior before consequences came.
This is what Zephaniah is doing.

He is offering the people to correct themselves.
It might feel harsh, but it is an offer of grace.

II. God's correction leads to transformation (v. 9-13).

If we accept the correction of Jesus, transformation happens.

If we accept that we are sinners.

If we believe that we have a problem and need help.

Then Jesus does not just forgive our sins.

He actually promises to transform us into something new.

Verse 9, **"For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord."**

This is a sudden restoration and change.

It is not slow and developing over time.

It is quick and radical.

Because the transformation Christ brings is sudden.

It is the transformation from death to life.

It is the transformation of resurrection.

It is the transformation from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

This idea of the pure tongue doesn't have to do with languages.

It is not about the kind of language that will be spoken in heaven.

It is about the quality and purity of the speech.

It is what is being said, not the language itself.

The words that come out of people's mouths will be clean.

No longer like Isaiah with unclean lips.

Because their speech and the way they talk will be transformed.

And everyone will now call on God's name.

The world will be transformed to a place where everyone calls God.

It will be transformed to a place of unity.

No longer will we be so divided by politics, or nationality, or culture.

We will all together serve Jesus with one accord.

Verse 10, **"From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering."**

Zephaniah's land that previously was judged.

A land that has long been allied with Egypt and one of their foes.

One of the last places you would assume are holy.

From Cush shall come worshippers of God.

It is a reversal of Babel.

It is a reversal of the spreading and division of humanity.

It is a finishing of what was begun at Pentecost.

Even from the places that are far off.

Even the nations God's people feared or thought of as enemies,

One day we will worship beside them.

Verse 11, **"On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain."**

This is more of the transformation.

We will be transformed from people who are ashamed, to those who can stand boldly in the presence of God.

We will be transformed from rebels and traitors to God, to those who are His sons and daughters.

We will be transformed from a people who are proud to those who are humble.

Now, in the presence of God, we will be as we should.

Verse 12, **"But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord."**

The people left behind.

Those who receive the correction of God,

Those who are following in faith.

They will be transformed.

From a prideful people to a humble people.

It is the afflicted and needy not just the humble.
It is not the people who have it all together, but those who don't.
And the transformation of God lets us seek and find refuge in Him.

Verse 13, **"those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid."**

This is a picture of who we will be after God transforms us.
Partially this is a promise to Israel.
But it is a promise to Christians as well.
Any who put their faith in God.
One day they will be transformed.
They will no longer be people who do injustice or sin.
No longer will we lie or misrepresent the truth.
Just imagine how incredible it would be if even for one day you no longer did these things.
If from now on you were never even tempted to sin or disobey God.
That the thought wouldn't even enter your mind?
That is the complete transformation God promises to bring.

We can be transformed as individuals.
But we as a people will be transformed.
The church, the bride of Christ will be transformed.
No longer will there be wheat and tares.
No longer will there be wolves masquerading as shepherds.
No longer will there be hypocrites and those tearing churches apart.

And one day we can lie down in peace.
One day there will be no one who can make you afraid.
There will be no news story to shake you.
No more natural disasters to fear.
No more nuclear weapons, school shootings, or random violence.
We will be able to leave in perfect peace with the Prince of Peace.

III. God's transformation leads to peaceful joy (v. 14-20).

The transformation God brings is not just nice.
It is not just a changing of our fashion or wardrobe.
It is not like putting makeup on a pig.
It is a lasting transformation that leads to peace and joy forever.

Verse 14, "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!"

We should sing aloud.
Not silently in our hearts.
we should shout!
We should sing loudly.
We should sing with all of our hearts.
Not because the song is great, but because God is.
Not because we feel like it, but because of what God has done.
Our worship should reflect who God is.
And what God has done for us.

Verse 15, "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."

Why more do we sing?
Why more are we filled with joy?
Because God has taken away our judgments.
This means the judgments God has against us.
The books in heaven filled with all of our sins.
All of our wrongs.
All the judgments the prophets could label against us.
All of the charges in heaven are dropped.
We are certainly guilty.
If God presses these charges we are going to hell forever.
But God drops the charges.
He takes away the judgments.
And He declares us righteous.

And He has cleared away the enemies.
One day Jerusalem will not need to fear its enemies.
One day the church will not need to fear her persecutors.
One day you will not need to fear demons or Satan.
We will never again need to fear any evil.

Verse 16, **"On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak."**

The idea of hands growing weak means being shaken by bad news.
The way your knees might go weak.
Or you might drop what you were holding if you got truly terrible news.
The transformation God brings, means one day there is nothing to fear.
Nothing will ever happen like that again.
No cop will knock on someones door to tell you someone has died.
No doctor will ask you to sit down while they explain the diagnosis.
No soldier will be told they are going to be deployed to war again.
There will be no more fear.
And we can live in a state of joyful peace that only comes from Jesus.

Verse 17, **"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 exult over you with loud singing."**

God will be in our midst.
In New Jerusalem.
In the new heavens and the new earth.
Jesus will be walking around.
He will be there in the middle of us.
He will not be far away.
He will be close enough to touch.

He is the one who is mighty.
And He is the one who will save us.
His salvation may be in the future.
But it is sure.

It will happen.

He will not just save us from hell and judgment.

He will save us from all evil and sin.

And He will rejoice over you.

This is a wild verse.

He will rejoice over us.

It will make us quiet,

And He will exult over us with loud singing.

God will burst out into song over you.

He will sing with such joy, and loudness, and love that it will take your breath away and make you silent.

This is the kind of verse that makes some of us uncomfortable.

Especially us men in the room.

It's an image that might make us feel weird.

But we need to see that this is the love God has for us.

This is the love God has for you.

Even in your sin.

Even when you would say "Why would anyone do this for me?"

God will sing His song over you.

Not quietly, but loud and lavishly.

Just like the resurrection was not quiet.

God's redemption and remaking of the world on the day of hope will not be quiet.

It will be a day of joy.

Verse 18, "I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach."

God will gather those far away.

Those who have been able to come to the temple for worship.

Maybe lived in towns far away.

Maybe too poor to make the trip.

Maybe like the Ethiopian Eunuch who was baptized but went back home.

Those who were too far from the temple.

Or those stuck in exile.

Think about those in the nursing homes.

Those stuck in hospitals.

Those with severely compromised immune systems and cannot be around us because of cancer treatments.

God will bring them all in.

Verse 19, **"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."**

That final day of hope will be a day to rejoice.

Because all of the oppressors will be dealt with.

For Israel, this means all the pagan nations that opposed them.

All the wicked empires that conquered and crushed the innocent.

But it also means all those who mistreat others.

All who have abused, neglected, and murdered those made in God's image.

They will be dealt with.

And God will save all the lame and outcast.

All those who have been oppressed and hated.

All those who have been cast off by the world.

Some of this is exactly what Jesus did.

Zephaniah prophesied and saw Jesus ministry.

But it is also what God will do in a greater way on the final day.

On that last day of hope.

Jesus will save all of the lame.

All who have been disabled.

All who have been broken and sick.

He will heal all of our wounds with His stripes.

The cancer will be no more.

Our memory problems will be restored.

The old joints that creak and hurt will work better than they ever have before.

And He will gather the outcast.

He will gather up all who have been cast out.

All those the world does not want.

All of us who may have been picked last at dodgeball.

Or those whose resume's got repeatedly looked over for someone else.

God sees you.

God will gather us all up to Him.

And God will turn our shame into fame.

This is the upside-down kingdom of God.

The meek inherit the Earth.

Those who have left everything to follow Jesus, gain the whole world.

Those who seem to have lost in this life will have won.

And everything you have given to follow Jesus is worth it.

Verse 20, "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."

This time is the final time.

It is at the end of this age.

When Christ returns in glory and power.

Every follower of Jesus will be gathered together.

And when we are gathered together that last day.

God will crown us with renown.

We will be praised and honored above all peoples.

Our fortunes will be restored.

We will get to see these things with our own eyes.

We will watch of God finally brings peace on earth.

What a joyfully and joyous day that will be.

And this day can be ours, if we accept the correction of Jesus.
If we hear the gospel and accept that we are sinners.
If we are willing to ask for His grace.
Then He will lavish His grace over us.
And we can be transformed into new life.
And we can have lasting, joyful peace forever.

Every week I end my benediction the same way.
I tell you to go in peace.
Part of that is a blessing.
It is declaring that if you have put faith in Christ, He gives you peace.
But it is also a reminder.
If you have been transformed by Christ,
This peace, this joy.
It is available to you now.
So, when you leave and walk out.
You can leave this place having accepted the correction of God, having
been further transformed into the image of Jesus, and filled with peaceful
joy.
Not because you learned something new.
Not because the preaching was great.
Not because the music sounded nice.
But because the Holy Spirit is in you.
Because God the Father is transforming you.
And He is giving you peace.