

Zephaniah 3:14-17 It's Time to Sing! Advent 3 Dec. 16-17, 2018

God's grace and peace are yours to give you joy in your Advent Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Christ's saving work and our heavenly Father's protecting love are described in Zephaniah 3:14-17 These are your words heavenly Father. May they help us sing to praise your holy name! Amen.

Dear Christian Friends,

Picture a battle taking place in the middle of a city where families live. Somehow a young child slips out of his home un-noticed. He is then surrounded by enemies who have no problem ending his young life. A soldier sees and blows those enemies away. The child is alone, crying and unsure what will happen. As tough as that soldier is, he gently picks him up, shelters him from the fighting, and carries him safely to his home. There are tears of joy with the family as they thank the soldier for saving their child.

Spiritually, we are that child in the middle of a spiritual war zone. Powerful enemies surround us as we foolishly wander in this world thinking that we can fight the powers of evil, sin, and devil on our own! They could so easily destroy us. But, Jesus is the soldier who fought our enemies. He died to destroy them, was raised in victory, and is with us now to see us safely home. It is not time to be sad, worried, or fearful. Be filled with joy for His rescue.

It's Time to Sing!

First, we need God's encouragement to sing with joy! Zephaniah said it in 4 ways, "*Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart...!*" (v.14) The Daughter of Zion refers to the true believers who survived despite the evil acts of Judah's king, false prophets, and self-serving priests. The prophecy to the "Daughter of Zion" includes all believers in the Savior. Through faith in Jesus we are connected to that long line of believers through the centuries.

What are the four ways God tell us to be joyful? The first word means to sing out joyfully. The second word means to shout joyfully. The third word means to feel glad inside and to show it. The fourth word has to do with celebrating. All these words are connected with victory. At a high school basketball game, when the home team wins what is the crowd's reaction? Are they sad or do they have their heads down? No! They cheer and clap and some high schools sing their school song. They show their happiness. That is how we are to be when we think of Jesus' victory for us.

Why did God need to tell us to sing for joy? We know the good news of Christ. But we also have many distractions which seek take away our joy. Sometimes our plans fail. Sometimes people let us down. Sometimes we get anxious or question God about problems or about the future. Stressful times take away the joy that God wants us to have. That is why He said, "*Do not fear...; do not let your hands hang limp*" (v.16). Our troubles are not to be the center of our attention. Rather, it is knowing that the Lord will ultimately take away all problems forever! Endure in the true faith! Don't give up!

How do we stay focused on the Lord? We can read Bible verses like Psalms #100 or #121 that remind us to be joyful. Open a hymnal and read or sing hymns of joy! This time of year, you can hear broadcasts of Christmas music about the Savior. This should be a happy time of year. But, we don't focus on Jesus, we can get sad. But when we stay focused on Him who works everything for our good, we have many reasons to be joyful!

Second, Jesus is the center of those reasons for joy. It states in our verses, *“The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.... He is mighty to save”* (v.16-17). Many people in Israel had no joy. False prophets lied to them about what God said. Priests no longer faithfully offered the sacrifices that God required. King Manasseh had taken the lives of many godly people. But, the remnant of believers could still trust in God! Earlier in Zephaniah God expressed His anger against His enemies. *“The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter.... That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress..., a day trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom.... [There] will be distress on the people ...because they have sinned against the LORD”* (Zephaniah 1:14-17). When Jesus appears on the Last Day and judges unbelievers, there will be weeping and bitterness. God preserve us from becoming such enemies of Christ! Without Jesus, God could show no mercy to us. With Jesus as our Savior, we hear: *“The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy”* (v.15).

Christ came to take away the punishment we deserved for our sins. That is why we are celebrating His coming as a baby. He took our place in life perfectly. And, when He died on the cross, His forgiveness erased our sins. Nothing will be held against us, not now or ever! We have no reason to fear judgment as long as we trust in Jesus to save us!

Our enemies, the devil, sin and hell will try to overcome us. The same three attacked Jesus while He was on the cross. But, by His innocent death He defeated them. Even death is only a sleep for the bodies of believers who are waiting for the resurrection. Jesus makes all the difference! The Word states: *“If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies”* (vs. 31, 33). With such great victories for us, our hearts should be filled with joy and our mouths should sing His praises. Paul wrote, *“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord”* (Ephesians 5:19).

Our verses continue, *“The LORD is with you”* (v.17). We don't see Jesus, but we believe His promise that He's here! He will not leave us until He accomplishes His good purpose for each of us. Because Jesus is with us we are told in our verses “do not fear.” There are many Bible examples where God or angels told people not to fear: the annunciation to Mary, the angels to the shepherds, and Jesus speaking with His disciples. He still speaks through His Word to us. God allows crisis situations so we can see our need for Him and His power to help. Jesus gives all the strength we need.

God gives us another reason to sing. Our verse states, *“He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing”* (v.17). God has a singing voice! No doubt, He will use it. Jesus said, *“There will be rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents...”* (Luke 15:7) There is nothing more important to God than to have us in heaven. We certainly will be happy to spend eternity with Jesus in heaven, but according to Zephaniah the Lord will be just as happy as we are. I can see Jesus leading a song of victory as we gather together in heaven. We will not find a greater love than Jesus' love for us!

Our spiritual rescue may not seem as dramatic as rescuing a child from death in a warzone. But, Jesus saving us is a greater accomplishment! Keep hearing God's promises and listen to the Christmas hymns. Jesus has won the victory over all our enemies. We are now Christ's and He is ours. We close with a hymn:

O rejoice, all Christians, loudly. For our joy has now begun; wondrous things our God has done.
Tell abroad His goodness proudly, who our race has honored so, That He lives with us below.
Joy, oh joy, beyond all gladness, Christ has done away with sadness! Hence, all sorrow and repining,
For the Sun of grace is shining! Amen.