

## Zephaniah 3:14-17

Contrary to what many people might believe, the biggest spoilsport at Christmas time is not **Ebenezer Scrooge** - the miserly character from Charles Dickens' classic book, "A Christmas Carol." And no, it's not the **Grinch** from the Dr. Seuss book, "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" either. The biggest spoilsport at **Christmas** time and at **every** time, is the **devil**. The devil doesn't want **anyone** to ever be **happy**, or to **rejoice** in our Lord Jesus Christ. Ever since the time of **creation**, when God **made** the world, and **blessed** man and woman with His fatherly **love**, inviting them to **enjoy** their fellowship with Him; the devil has been trying to **spoil** and **destroy** that relationship. We know how the devil brought **temptation** to Adam and Eve, seducing them to eat from the fruit of the tree which God had **forbidden**. And so, **sin** entered into **their** lives, and unfortunately with **their** fall into sin, **all people** fell into **sin, shame**, and the **fear** of God. Even today, you and I come before God with lives that have been **blemished** with sin. We are unable to stand in the presence of our **perfect** and **holy** God, and we are **afraid** of what will happen when we come face-to-face with Him at the time of our **death**. As we think about all the different ways we continually **disappoint** our God - all the **envy**, the **addictions**, the unforgiving **attitudes** - not only does it bring tears to **our** eyes, but it brings tears to **God's** eyes as well. So, considering how **messed up** we are, and how **often** we come up **short** of God's perfect standard, did the devil actually **succeed** in his mission? Is it **true** that we **can't** rejoice and be **glad** in the LORD anymore? Is it **true** that even **Christmas** time must end up being a time of **despair**?

Well, it **would** be true if all we had **going** for us was our **own** love, and strength, and understanding. But, we have **more** - we have God **Himself** fighting against, and even **destroying**, the works of the devil. Our gracious God was not going to idly stand by, and let the devil **ruin** our lives. Already back in the Garden of Eden, God announced His intention to **destroy** the **devil** and all his **power**, and to deliver **all people** from the misery of **sin**, by sending a **Savior**. That Savior would be God's own **Son**, and no matter **what** the devil might try, he would **not** be able to **derail** God's plan, or **defeat** God's Son. That message of salvation brought **joy** to the hearts of Adam and Eve - joy that they would be able to **hold on** to in **bad** times, in **good** times, and even when they would come face-to-face with **death**. They **knew** that in **spite** of their sinfulness, God still **loved** them.

As time went on, God would **repeat** His promise to send the Savior, many times over. Especially when His people were facing times of **difficulty** and even **destruction**, God would speak words of **hope** to them, which brings us to today's

sermon text. During the prophetic ministry of **Zephaniah** - about 600 years before the birth of Jesus - **judgment** was about to fall on the people of Judah. God was going to unleash His **wrath** on them, because they had treated His **grace** like **trash**. God was going to **break** the **unbreakable** city of **Jerusalem**. That was absolutely **crushing** news for the Israelites, but **Zephaniah** also announced **good** news. The LORD would come to **deliver** His people from their enemies, and to **purify** for Himself a people who would be able to live without **fear** or **shame**. Zephaniah's **message** was that God would send a **Savior** - our Lord Jesus. So **wonderful** was the promise of His coming that Zephaniah said to the people of his day, "*Sing, O Daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O Israel! Be Glad And Rejoice With All Your Heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem!*" That same invitation goes out to each one of us **today**. As we look forward to the **birth** of that Savior, as well as to His **second** coming, we are encouraged to, **Be Glad And Rejoice With All Your Heart**.

The Prophet Zephaniah invites us to **rejoice** with **great** joy - in other words, **rejoice** to rejoice - **really** rejoice - don't just make it look good on the **outside**, but rejoice **through** and **through**. Think about the 3 parables that **Jesus** shared with us in Luke 15. In the parable about the lost **sheep**, Jesus said the **shepherd** would leave behind 99 of his sheep, in order to go out and search for one **lost** sheep. And then after He **found** that lost sheep, He would call his friends and says, "*Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.*" In the same way, when the **woman** who had lost one of her 10 **coins** finds the lost coin, she calls her friends together and says, "*Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.*" And likewise, when the **father** sees his lost **son** heading back home, he **runs** to him, **hugs** him, and calls to his servants, "*Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*" That's the kind of rejoicing **God** has for **us**. We had all gone **astray** - gone our **own** way - a way that only led to a **dead-end** street. We were **lost** in **sin**, but then Jesus **found** us, **blessed** us with His **mercy**, and **restored** us to the heavenly Father's **family**. It is with **great rejoicing** that God celebrates our salvation.

And it all began on **Christmas** - the day of Jesus' **birth**. **Quietly**, a son was delivered from Mary's womb, and laid in a manger. **Routinely**, the shepherds watched their flocks. **Graciously**, God sent an angel to tell of the Savior's birth, and then ... **suddenly**, the sky lit up with a host of angels **praising** God and singing, "*Glory to God in the highest.*" It was a time for **great rejoicing**, so let's take our cue from God, and **rejoice** with great joy, as Zephaniah said, "*Sing, O Daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O Israel! Be Glad And Rejoice With All Your Heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem!*"

Then in the very next sentence, Zephaniah gives us the **reason** for our joy. *“The LORD has **taken away** your punishment, he has **turned back** your enemy.”* It’s an undeniable **fact** that we are **sinner**s - **selfish** sinners. In fact, we often become so **consumed** with **our** needs and **our** pleasures, that we become **blind** to the needs of **others**. Our priorities are often **twisted**. We spend all kinds of time and resources to provide ourselves with the things **we** want - the things **we** like - that special top-of-the-line **phone** with the free **music** app, those expensive **theater** or **stadium** tickets, those big-boy **toys** which never seem to be quite **new** enough or **shiny** enough to keep us satisfied. Although there’s nothing really **wrong** with those things in and of themselves, all too often **pursuing** them leaves us **without** time and resources for our **God**, or for those who are going without the **necessities** of life. When we don’t put **God first**, and **others second**, we show that we are **sinner**s, and because of our **sin**, we deserve **punishment**.

But we don’t actually have to **suffer** that punishment, because Zephaniah goes on to tell us, *“The LORD has **taken away** your punishment.”* God **removed** that punishment from us in a most **amazing** way. The LORD laid the sins of the whole world on His **Son** - the **holy Child** born on Christmas Day. Then the LORD **punished** that Child instead of punishing **us**. Isaiah said it so clearly in the 53rd chapter of his book of prophecy. *“**He** was pierced for **our** transgressions, **he** was crushed for **our** iniquities; the **punishment** that brought **us** peace was upon **him**, and by **his** wounds **we** are **healed**.”* Jesus has set us free from **all** punishment, so **through** Him, we are now at **peace** with God, and we can **Be Glad And Rejoice** in that peace.

But here’s **another** reason for us to **rejoice**. Zephaniah goes on to tell us, *“The LORD has **turned back** your **enemy**.”* That **enemy** is **Satan**, and the powerful **weapon** he holds over us is **death**. Death looks very **ominous** to us, until we see it in the light of Jesus’ **victory**. The Lord Jesus **defeated** Satan, and **disarmed** him, so for us, that weapon of **death** has lost its **sting**. Because of Jesus, you and I will walk **through** valley of death, and right into our **eternal life** in **heaven**. Therefore once again, we can **Be Glad And Rejoice With All Our Heart**.

Zephaniah **still** isn’t finished, as he gives still **another** reason for our joy. He wrote, *“The **LORD**, the King of Israel, is **with** you. Never again will you fear **any** harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, ‘Do not fear, O Zion. Do not let your hands hang limp. The **LORD** your God is **with** you, he is **mighty** to **save**.”* Jesus is the **LORD** our **God**, and Jesus is our **King**. He Himself says, *“**All authority** in heaven and earth has been given to me.”* He Himself says, *“I am with you*

*always.*” And the Apostle Paul wrote, “*If God is **for** us, who can be **against** us? ... Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are **more** than **conquerors** through **him** who **loved** us.*” **Nothing** can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And finally, here’s one **more** way the prophet pictures **Jesus** for us. Our text concludes, “*He will take great **delight** in you, he will **quiet** you with his love; he will **rejoice** over you with singing.*” Zephaniah says that **Jesus** takes **delight** in us, that He **quiets** us with His **love**, and that He **rejoices** over us with **singing**. All of these things show us that it’s going to be a rotten Christmas for **Satan**. Once again he will have to face the **fact**, that his efforts to prevent God’s people from **rejoicing** in the LORD, have **failed**. Once again Satan will know that our hearts beat with **love** for our gracious God. And once again he will hear the sounds of **great joy** that come out of our mouths as **We Are Glad And Rejoice With All Our Hearts**. Amen.