



HG188 *Zephaniah*
The Great Day Of The Lord

Zephaniah 1:14 - 2:3

Home Group Study Notes

27 October 2019 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

After an argument, are you a quick “*kiss and make up*” kind of person or do you stew and hang on to the grievance for a few days?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon

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The Warrior King

Our Lord is a God of Love Grace Peace and Mercy but he is also a Warrior and although we much prefer to think of God as loving and Jesus as the Good Shepherd we should be reminded of Jesus' own anger when He made a whip out of cords, overturned the money lenders tables in the temple and scattered their money on the ground, Jn 2:13-22, and of course in John's vision of the Son of God in the book of Revelation he describes the greatest battle in the whole of history as the Conqueror King, Jesus Christ slaughters his enemies, Rev 19 11-15 and 19-21. We cannot imagine the devastation that will come on the Day of the Lord when the Warrior God goes into battle against his enemies and because we cannot imagine it, we prefer to ignore it, or disbelieve it or choose to think that we will somehow escape judgement because we are His people. Zephaniah's message although given for Jerusalem and Judah is universal in its impact and no one will escape God's anger, *"the whole earth will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth."* v18.

The Great Day Of The Lord

Up to v13 of Chapter 1 Zephaniah spoke about the Day of the Lord, but in today's reading starting at v 14 he steps up a gear and the Day of the Lord becomes the *"Great Day of the Lord"* and that day is near and coming quickly. It is referred to as a day of the *Lord's Wrath* in 1:18 and 2:2 and 2:3 it is a *"day of the Lords wrath and anger."* In the Hebrew Bible, as well as alluding to times in the future, the Day of the Lord can also refer to temporal events such as the invasion by an aggressor. New Testament writers referred to it as something that will happen in their own times or to predicted events in the future including the final judgement on the last day and also to the first and second coming of Jesus Christ.

Here Zephaniah's message could not be clearer, it will be a day of terrible judgement, one of unbelievable distress and anguish, a day of darkness, ruin and desolation. Joel says almost the identical thing in Chapter 2.2 when he said, *"Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem! Sound the alarm on the holy mountain! Let everyone tremble in fear because the day of the Lord is upon us. It is a day of darkness and gloom, a day of thick clouds and deep blackness."*

Joel gives warnings but Zephaniah goes further when he exposes the sins that arouse God's wrath as we read in chapter 1. God is full of righteous anger and nothing we can imagine can compare with the utter devastation that will come upon the earth on the day of judgement and his ultimate judgement of sin. God points an accusing finger at his people and verse after verse it just gets more and more discouraging, more and more terrifying as he intends to bring the full weight of his anger on his people and the reason is to be found in v17 - *"because they have sinned against the Lord."*

People may say *"I don't believe in a day of judgement,"* well whether we believe it or not, it is coming and in one of the most sobering passages in all the bible, we are told it will be a cosmic devastating final judgement. We may argue that now as we live in different times under the New Testament covenant with Jesus Christ, can what Zephaniah says really still apply to us and is it to be believed?

If you doubt what Zephaniah says in the Old Testament listen to what Jesus says when he is foretelling the future. In Matthew 3:7 he warned the people of his day to *“flee from the wrath to come,”* In Matthew 24:29 when he warns us about a day that is coming and quotes from Joel 2:10, very similar to what Zephaniah is saying here, Jesus said - *‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’* See also Mark 13:24-26 John 12:48, John 6:40, Luke 12:39-40, Luke 21:11.

Warnings And Promises

The book of Zephaniah deals with 2 things that concerns all of us. The first thing is warnings. The second thing is promises. Promises that the Lord makes to those who are humble and righteous and who seek refuge in Him will be saved. Chapter 2 starts with a call to the nations to in v1- *“Gather together- yes nations gather together you shameless nation.”* These words echo similar commands from another time when in 2 Chronicles 7:14 perhaps the most famous and well used verse on revival in the bible, God says *“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”* If the people humble themselves, pray and seek God, then he will hear, forgive and heal.

He goes on to say in 2v3, *“Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger.”* In these verses in chapter 2:1-3 we find hope in an otherwise bleak and terrifying book. Hope that the sinner may yet be spared from the wrath of the Mighty Warrior God if they turn and seek Him, but the command comes with a warning to all to do so quickly because time is running out. v2 -*“Gather together before judgement begins before your time to repent is blown away like chaff.”*

Up to now we have been terrorized with the threat of judgement but at the start of chapter 2 we are offered the hope of restoration. God raised up Zephaniah to proclaim the warning of the coming judgement but also to encourage repentance and now He offers his people a way out. He invites the people to gather together and pray. The Warrior God offers peace and extends grace, offering life, restoration and redemption if we turn to Him and repent. The secret at the heart of experiencing his grace is repentance.

The Grace Of God

Grace is arguably the most important concept and term in the bible, it is the foundation of Christianity and the essence of salvation. Even in our worst moments of sin and rebellion God still loves us and waits for signs of repentance when he will smother us in forgiveness and love because of his grace. God judges, but God forgives. Today people have lost the incredible awesomeness of this fact but prophets and authors of Hebrew scripture would have been amazed by this wonder. Daniel 9:9 says, *“the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him,”* but Exodus 34:6-7 says, *“The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.”* How do we reconcile these different assertions that God is merciful and forgiving and yet his forgiveness is costly, and cannot go unpunished.

The New Testament authors solve this mystery for us when Paul said in Romans 3:25-26 *“God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance (tolerance) he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

Grace Is A Person

Grace is more than a principle, it is more than a theory or an idea, it is more than doctrine or dogma. Grace is a Person and his name is Jesus.

1 John 2:2 “*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*” Propitiation simply means an action meant to regain favour with someone or to make up for something you did wrong. When Jesus Christ died on the cross he did something for us in order that we might regain the Father's favour. When we think of Grace as a Person it is harder to abuse the gift of grace lavished on us day after day and it makes it harder to abuse the free gift of forgiveness the next time we take it for granted and continue in our old habits and behaviour that is displeasing to the Lord. Grace is a Person and our forgiveness cost Him dear.

Grace Is Costly

God is a covenantal God, he relates to people by way of binding personal and intimate relationships, “*You will be my people and I will be your God.*” Ex 6:7. Despite God's faithfulness his people have always been unfaithful, rebellious and self-willed yet time and again he has forgiven them because he loves them. Incredible as that is, he loves us. God loves and God forgives and he asks us to repent and turn to him. If we do return to Him and repent of our sins and accept His Lordship over our lives then nothing thereafter can separate us from his love and no sin can bring us into condemnation because of Christ's atoning sacrifice. *However*, we must remember that sin is so serious and so grievous to God that Jesus had to die in order that we might escape the terror of his judgement. We need to understand and recognise these two aspects of God's grace and our forgiveness otherwise we can fall into one of two errors.

If we fail to grasp the costliness of our forgiveness we will think it's easy for God to forgive us and we will offer him superficial confession that will never lead to any real change of heart. We will take the gift of forgiveness for granted believing, “*its what God does*” and we will carry on as before. When you pardon or excuse a debt it means that you absorb the debt, you write it off and you bear the payment. Our great debt of sin against God required an infinite payment at a cost that we could never ever repay and the only way for God to pardon us and forgive us was if he were to bear the debt himself, and that is what he asked his Son to do on our behalf. Jesus came and took our punishment and then he sent his Holy Spirit to help us receive and understand that costly forgiveness. We have all loved things more than we love God, this is what sin is, it is dishonouring God by preferring things over him, we glorify what we enjoy most and it isn't God.

Grace Is A Free Gift

However if we don't also understand the freeness of the forgiveness obtained by the grace of God through Christ's sacrifice, then we will never truly believe we are forgiven. We will continue to live with guilt, shame and self-loathing. We'll continue to try to please God and earn our forgiveness and his favour. We need to understand and also appreciate the cost of forgiveness, yet rejoice in the freeness of the gift of God's Grace and then we will be free from guilt and from the power of sin in our lives. Jesus Christ died and paid for our sins, we are no longer condemned. If we forget this, confession becomes an exhausting self-punishing penitence, it can also become shallow and trivial neither honouring God nor changing our lives. Gospel repentance trusts in the costly free gift of grace offered to us by the Father through His Son Jesus Christ.

God's Wrath Is Just

At the state opening of parliament recently the Queen was shown the respect and admiration her position as our sovereign deserves. She was waited on, bowed to as you would fully expect. The Creator of the universe is infinitely worthy of more respect, more honour, more loyalty, more admiration more submission, more obedience... and that is why sin and failure to love him is not trivial and why he cannot simply ignore it. Our sin belittles God and he feels a holy wrath against it. God's wrath is just. It was not simply withdrawn, it was spent, it was diverted elsewhere. We can always depend on God to do what is right and fair and indeed he would cease to be just if he simply ignored our sin. It's not enough to plead with God that we have been a good person so perhaps he could overlook the occasions when we have been disobedient, just as a human judge could not free a convicted murderer because of his previous record of being a law-abiding citizen. Where would the justice be in that?

Conclusion

This is a difficult message that has serious consequences, if not for you because you are secure in Jesus Christ, but for all those you know who are stumbling blindly through life with no inkling of what they face on the Great Day of the Lord. Don't be tempted to create God in your own image and *think* you know what he is like and how he will deal with you rather than read his Word and try to understand it. Just because you think you are nice don't believe that God likes and approves of your every word, thought or action, unheard and unseen by others except by Him. Is 55:8 says, *"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine."* There is only one way to be sure that you are forgiven and saved and that is through Jesus Christ. He is *"the way the truth and the life."* Jn 14:6. Helen Keller was once quoted as saying, *"Science may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all -- the apathy of human beings."* It sounds like the prophet Zephaniah might say the same thing.

God wants our repentance to change us from the inside out. The author Richard Sibbes said in *The Bruised Reed*, that repentance is not *"a little bowing down of our heads.. but a working our hearts to such a grief that will make sin itself more odious than the punishment."* When confessing sin, don't do so on the basis that if you don't stop such and such you are going to be punished, rather say to yourself, *"how can I treat Jesus like this who died in my place so that I would never be punished? Is this how I treat him after all he has done for me?"* And when you refuse to forgive another for some hurt, will you withhold forgiveness when Jesus died to forgive you? Our God is a good God. He warns us of a day of devastation and judgement but he is gracious and loving enough to tell us how to avoid it. In spite of ourselves he offers us safe passage avoiding his wrath and judgement. John Piper puts it like this, *"The wisdom of God has ordained a way for the love of God to deliver us from the wrath of God without compromising the justice of God."* God is not content to only show his wrath, he has shown his love and mercy too. He has shown us Grace and his Name is Jesus.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2019

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another and the blood
of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:7



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Is it at all comforting to know that God will come to judge the world? How should we Christians anticipate this judgement?

2. What is the difference between sorrow over sin and repentance? Is it possible to have one without the other? How?

3. Do you understand that sin is first and foremost a heart issue? Do you treat your sin as if it is a behaviour to correct or a heart issue to repent of?

4. Do you often struggle with the same sin over and over again? Have you confessed and repented of that sin?

5. Grace, although a free gift, was costly to God the Father and to Jesus Christ the Son. Does it help to think of Grace as a Person when tempted to take God's forgiveness for granted?

6. God loves you deeply in spite of your sin. How do you view God in light of this? How does this knowledge shape your behaviour?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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