
Sermon Notes

December 22, 2019

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW **When Trials Test You** Zephaniah 3:14-20

Hope

- ❖ Hope = a vision of better days ahead that changes us in the present
 - rock solid assurance that even in the worst of times, better days lie ahead
 - God has plans for good and not for evil
 - God has plans to provide a future and a hope
- ❖ God gives us a beautiful, tender, life-changing promise in Zephaniah 3:17
 - the power of suffering and beauty to “crack open” the human heart (Simone Weil)
 - Zephaniah 3:17 will crack your heart open with its beauty if you let it

Zephaniah: Life and Times

- ❖ God speaks **TO** Zephaniah and **THROUGH** Zephaniah when Josiah is king of Judah
 - for 57 years prior to Josiah, Judah has two really bad kings (Manasseh and Amnon)

- Josiah sets about getting his country back on a path of reform by “cleaning house”
- ❖ God is also involved in “cleaning house” His way (Zephaniah 1:2-4)
 - God always starts His “house cleaning” projects with His own people (1 Peter 4:17)
 - God's preeminent concern is promoting holy thinking and holy living among those who belong to Him
 - will God’s people love and serve God or will they pledge allegiance to the destructive, angry gods of their neighbors?
 - will God’s people care for the poor, the oppressed, the widow and the orphan?
 - speaking through Zephaniah, God forecasts that a major shakeup is coming
 - the day of the Lord
 - God is patient and loving, merciful and gracious, but God will not tolerate wickedness and depravity among His people
 - “tough love”... God’s love is strong and fierce
 - the Lord saves us from anything that threatens us (external or internal enemies)

Trials That Test Us

- ❖ HOW does God fight for the purity of His people?
 - at times, God has to fight through your sin to get you back

- at times, God designs trials that test you so you better understand what is going on in the dark corners of your heart
 - as hard as it may be to face this, the trials God designs are signs that God loves you and is fighting for you
 - God fights for your freedom and joy
 - God fights to give you bright hope for tomorrow
- ❖ All of us are addicted to sin in one form or another
 - to free us of this, we need God’s intervening love
 - when trials test you and it seems that God is against you, God is **FOR** you
 - God takes away lesser things that will never bring you joy so you can know real joy

A God Who Delights in Us

- ❖ God delights in you and *will rejoice over you with gladness* (Zephaniah 3:17)
 - “What does God feel when He thinks of me?”
 - God actually **LIKES** you!
 - God rejoices over you with gladness!
- ❖ Zephaniah connects the dots between the promises God makes to His people in the past with their future fulfillment for us through Jesus
 - if you trust in Jesus and turn to Him, God will delight in you just as much as He delights in Jesus

- nothing in all that world will ever cause God to stop rejoicing over you with gladness
- because of Jesus, God “lights up and beams” when He sees you coming!
- ❖ God promises to *quiet you by His love*
 - imagine being wrapped up in the embrace of God
 - find rest in the arms of the God who promises to quiet you with His love
- ❖ Despite everything that changes in the world around us, God says there is one thing that will never change: His love
 - God *will exult over you with loud singing*
 - not a lullaby, **LOUD** singing!!
- ❖ The promise of Christmas is a promise of strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow

Personal Reflection

1. What trials has God designed for you during this particular season of life? How may God be using those trials to help you better understand what is going on in the dark corners of your heart?
2. What will best help you in the midst of those trials to hold on the fact that God loves you and that He is working **FOR** you and not against you?
3. How do you answer the question, “What does God feel when He thinks of me?” Does thinking through Zephaniah 3:17 reshape your answer to that question in any way?