

Called to be the Remnant

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: Zephaniah 1-3
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Today we're gonna be challenged from the word of God, we're gonna be encouraged in the word of God to be the remnant that God has called us to be, and to do so, I would encourage you to turn to the book of the Bible that you may have never turned to in this context before, it's the book of Zephaniah. That's toward the end of your Old Testament in a section that we collectively call the minor prophets. Those of you who are seasoned veterans here at First Baptist understand that we're working our way through the minor prophets, each one of these every week as we gather together.

Zephaniah contains an entire three chapters, very similar to the rest of the minor prophets, very short in length but strategic in message, and if you look at the book of Zephaniah kind of from a bird's eye view, in chapter 1 the Lord is very frustrated, he is upset, in fact, we might say that he is angry with his people. In chapter 3, he continues on a list of accusations that we're gonna deal with in just a moment of why he is so upset. But in the midst there, there is a word of challenge, there is a word of encouragement for those who would not go the way of the world, for those who would not fall with the flow of the current trends, in fact, in chapter 2, verse 7, it says, "And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon." Go to verse 9 of chapter 2, "Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them." In the midst of these accusations, the Lord calls us, challenges us and encourages us to be the remnant.

Now when we speak of the remnant, when we speak of that statistical minority that stands up in the midst of a culture that has gone wayward, there's two questions we have to ask and the first one is this: what is God so upset about? Why is he so upset not just at the Israelites in their day but potentially our culture today? Well, you have to understand that when the Lord gave Zephaniah this message, they were about one generation away from the Babylonian captivity. It's been said many times in our context that biblical Christianity is only one generation from becoming extinct; if we do not share with the next generation, if we do not continue to preach and to teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we find ourselves in the exact same position. It's not just the timing, though, it's the audience. In fact, as you read through the book of Zephaniah, as in most of the minor

prophets, we discover that God's frustration is with the people collectively but it's with two groups of people specifically, the priests and the pastors, and one thing that the Lord says very clearly in the minor prophets that we need to grasp today. So as goes the "church house," there goes the culture, and what we see in Zephaniah all throughout these three very small chapters is the Lord is upset that the priests who are supposed to represent the Lord, the priests who receive the tithings of and the sacrifices of the people, that they have become tainted with the world, and the pastors who are supposed to shepherd them and to educate and to teach them and to guide them have gone down the same path.

Now today it's very easy and I can do this to throw the proverbial rock through the stained glass of those who we find in a ministerial position and a role, however, if we look throughout the New Testament, we discover that as a believer in Jesus Christ we possess these same titles as well. In fact, the Bible says in the book of Hebrews 10 that Jesus Christ made one sacrifice for all time and ever liveth to maketh intercession. In the book of Revelation 1:6, it says he has called us to be priests and one day we shall reign with him on the earth. Today, you don't need to bring a physical sacrifice to a physical person in a physical location to be made right with God and to have atonement, in fact, if we come to a place in our life where we understand that we are sinful and that Jesus Christ is the only solution to our sin problem, he forgives us, he saves us, and the only Mediator we need is Jesus Christ himself. We have a direct connection, a direct relationship with Jesus Christ.

So you are a priest unto God through your relationship with Jesus Christ, but you're also a pastor. I know many of you think, "Ah, I'm not a pastor." Oh, you are. In 1 Peter 5, beginning in verse 1 through verse 5, it says that as a shepherd we should feed the flock that the Lord has given us. Not overlords like the Gentiles but feed them with gentleness and meekness, and so one day we shall receive the crown of rejoicing. Oftentimes we look at that passage and we call it the "pastor's crown," but that concept of shepherding, the Lord has called you to pastor your home; the Lord has called you to pastor your workplace, you may be the only light of the Gospel where you work; the Lord has called you to pastor your sports team; pastor your school. In fact, if there is anybody who you have influence in or around in your life, I've got news for you: they may call you "boss," they may call you "coach," but you're their pastor is who you are, and the Lord has called us not only in a relationship with him but to guide others in like manner.

So when we look back in Zephaniah, yes, we see the Israelites went wayward, yes, we see the Babylonians came in and took them captive, but we need to also see this is a message for us, this is a warning for us how do we easily get entrapped into the same scenario. Beginning in chapter 1, we have a list of accusations. Now for the sake of time, we're not gonna walk through every single one of these at great length. They are gonna be listed on the screen with the verse of which is referencing them. But the first one is hopefully obvious, it's idolatry. Chapter 1, verse 4 and 5, it says it all begins with idolatry. Now you'll remember back in the book of Habakkuk when we talked about revival, kind of that last stage, that last step of revival was making sure that all of those things, all those items, all those relationships that stood between you and God were

removed. Well, here it says that because there are idols, because there are those things that are blocking the relationship with the Lord, that's how all the process begins. That's why the Lord is so upset.

What does idolatry do? It naturally leads to spiritual apathy. In fact, in verse 6 of chapter 1, what we discover is that they took their faith for granted, they took their relationship with the Lord for granted, and much like muscles that if not worked out can atrophy over a period of time, so can our spiritual muscles. As we are absent from prayer, as we are absent from Bible studies, we're absent from walking with the Lord, pretty soon that translates into a pretty scary scenario.

It's the third of the 10 that's so frightening, it's the influence on society. I said earlier, as the church goes so goes the culture. When the people of God start advocating and promoting sin, then the pagans and the heathens will run with it like no tomorrow and that's exactly what was happening in Israel's day, that's exactly what is happening in our day as well.

What does that mean? That means then the people of God began a lifestyle of worldliness. You can't tell any difference between believers and non-believers, you can't tell any difference between a church and a country club. You can't tell any difference. It's not just the dress, it's not just the language, it's behavior, it's endorsement, and by the way, in our culture it's what we celebrate versus what we condemn. There was worldliness. They could not tell in Zephaniah's day who were the people of God and who were not. It sounds like a spiritual mirror to our world, does it not?

The fifth thing, the end of chapter 1, is that the people of God began to believe that they would not be held accountable or in judgment for their behavior and their sin. Now I'm gonna make it very clear this morning, the Bible makes it clear over and over and over again that as a child of God, as a believer in Jesus Christ, if you're saved, you're saved. You're his child. You are born again. You're born one time into his family. However, there are several passages, 1 Corinthians 3, 2 Corinthians 5, Romans 14, written to believers in Jesus Christ that says one day we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of that which we've done in the flesh whether it be good or bad. Now verse 15 of 1 Corinthians 3 says yet we shall be saved from fire. This isn't a judgment to determine whether it's heaven or hell, that was decided the day you got saved, this is a judgment, this is an accountability not that you are saved but what did you do with your salvation? How did you live after getting saved? The Israelites took the Lord for granted and many of us are just as guilty.

We fast forward to chapter 3, we get the second list. There's the accusation of the righteous, in other words, those who were staying true to the word of God were accused of being narrow-minded, bigoted, archaic and old-fashioned. Sound familiar? And those who strayed from the word of God were celebrated and received accolades in their culture. They actually accused those who desired a biblical righteousness. They began to ignore God's voice.

You say, "Well, how do you know they were ignoring God's voice?" Not only in the passage that's listed, but Isaiah had come through, Jeremiah had come through, Obadiah had come through, all these prophets had come through hollering saying, "Oh, please repent!" And they ignored every single one of them. The problem with ignoring God's voice is then you seep into this next one, you begin to desire instant worldly gratification. You know, in today's world and culture, we no longer are willing to delay gratification of any type, whether that's a relational type, a financial type, whatever it may be, but what the Israelites are falling into the trap was, "I want what I want and I want it now, and if I could've gotten it yesterday, it would've been better." And yet that's our culture today. How many times do we get upset, "God, you're not doing it fast enough. I'll just do it on my own." They became self-sufficient. "God, I don't need you. I don't need your provision. I don't need your means, your ways. I got this. I know what I'm doing." It's the same speech we gave ourselves in the garden of Eden and look how that one worked out.

Here's the last accusation, the last thing that is declared is they had what I call reckless spiritual leadership. In chapter 3, verses 4 through 7, what they essentially were doing was this, they were twisting and turning the word of God to make it fit what they wanted it to say, advocate what they wanted advocated, and to be silent on that which they wanted to be silent on. In other words, rather than letting the word of God speak for what it spoke on, they said, "Well, that's not what it really says. It really means this." They twist and they turn it and that's exactly what has happened to our culture today. There are people who claim to be believers in Jesus Christ, claim they believe the Bible, claim to be whatever we would call as a "Christian," and yet they advocate and they celebrate things that are called sin and abominations in Scripture.

Guess what? Zephaniah's world is our world. This is the world we live in. It is my hope, it is my desire that you're out there today saying, "I don't want to be that kind of person. I don't want to be that kind of man. I don't want to be that kind of woman." Then can I encourage you to be the remnant? Can I encourage you to be that which he called out in chapter 2, verses 7 and 9, a remnant? Think about that just definition-wise: it's a carpet remnant, it's a piece of the whole.

So we have to ask ourselves, what is a remnant, or shall we say, what is the remnant? All throughout Scripture you see this concept whether it was the Baal worshipers that Elijah defeated on the mountain, and remember thereafter he said, "O God, I'm the only one." He said, "Don't worry, there's 7,000 others." Or whether it be in the book of Revelation in the midst of the antichrist and all of his tirades, those famous 144,000. It's not just those passages, it's all throughout Scripture the Lord mentions a remnant: Jeremiah speaks of it; Haggai speaks of it; all the prophets speak of it. But there's two interesting passages in the prophets that we need to make note of. The first one is this: in the book of Isaiah 6, that famous passage where Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up and says, "Who will go for us?" and Isaiah says, "I'll go. I'll go." Do you know what the Lord says? "They're gonna have deaf ears, they're not gonna pay attention to you. There will only," listen to this, "There will only be a tenth," in fact some of your Bibles say, "There will only be a tithe that will hear." In the book of Amos 5, it says though 1,000 go out, only 100 will

return. And lest we forget, when Jesus healed the lepers, 10 of them were healed and only one of them returned back to thank him.

So when you look at the definition of a remnant in Scripture, what it essentially means is this, that as a general rule of thumb, 1/10 of those who profess the title, 1/10 of those who profess to be are actually the genuine real deal. That was the truth in Israel's time and that is the truth in today's time.

You know, we mention that term 1/10, we mention that concept of a tithe that's mentioned even in correlation with the remnant, today is not a message on giving per se, but can I give you some encouragement? You do understand statistically that right at about 10% of those who claim to be believers actually "biblically tithe," and I know there's a lot of discussion out there and people say, "Well, that was the Old Testament, we live in the day of grace." That's right, by the grace of God he said, "Hey, you get to keep 90%." But that's a whole other story. In 2 Corinthians 9, he says give generously, give cheerfully. Let me interpret tithing in light of an empty tomb: don't end there, start there. But here's what I want to say, do you realize how rare it is in our culture to be a believer in Jesus Christ? Do you believe how rare it is as a believer in Jesus Christ to actually trust the Lord with our finances? When you write that check, when you give online, if you do what we call biblically tithing, let me tell you what you're doing, you're saying, "God, I'm the remnant. I'm the one who is different. I am the one who will stand. I will trust you even if it does not make mathematical sense."

You see, the definition of the remnant is when nine go away, you're the one that returns. The definition of the remnant is when nine say, "Oh, we don't need to do that," you say, "But I can't help but do so." So what's the description of the remnant? Fast forward to chapter 3, verse 13. On the backside of the accusations, right before a great passage on restoration, it says, "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid." Four simple things there that describe the remnant. The first one is this: there is no iniquity found in them. Now there's a lot of biblical passages that describe sin as trespassing and stepping across the line and missing the mark, but iniquity, that's that concept found all the way back in Ezekiel 28 when then Lucifer became Satan, it says iniquity was found in him. Let me share with you, this is how you can know you're the remnant, that when you get up in the morning, your desire, your heart's cry is to not violate the precepts of God. You desire to serve him more than anything else the world can and promises you. No iniquity found in them.

Notice the second thing, there is no lying found in them. If that doesn't make you the remnant, I don't know what does. Living in a world where both on the sacred and the secular we've gotten to the point we don't know who's telling the truth and who's not, whether they're "in church" or out.

No deceit. Let me put that in 21st century terms. There is no bait-and-switch. In other words, we don't tell our business partner, "Oh, I'm gonna do Plan A," and then behind their back we do Plan B. Deceit is when you present one thing but you actually intend to

do something else and the remnant says, "You know what? It may not be well received, it may not be liked but it is what it is and here is it."

But notice that last thing, there's no fear. Why did the Lord say no fear? Because if you desire to serve the Lord, if you trust the Lord, if you're honest and you're not deception filled in your life, I'm gonna tell you what's gonna happen, you're gonna receive opposition and it won't just be from the pagans and the heathens, it'll be from the religious folks who say, "Hey, you're spoiling our parade here. We've got things working the right direction. Why do you have to keep standing up and saying something about holiness? I'm interested in happiness." You know, the Lord never calls us to be happy, he calls us to be holy.

So here we stand today in the midst of a culture even under the umbrella of professed Christianity that has become so tainted by the world, will we be the remnant? Will we be the ones willing to stand up when nobody else does? Will we be the ones to give when everybody else is interested in taking? Will we be the ones who said, "I'm more interested in truth than self-preservation"? Then, my friends, we shall be called the remnant of God and even though it looks kind of rough on the outside, God always blesses and protects the remnant, he always judges the other 90%, and so the question is which side of the line do you stand?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe you're that individual this morning that as you saw the testimony in the water, as you heard the words of the song, even as you saw the testimony of that video from South Korea, maybe you're saying, "You know, it's great to hear all this talk about the remnant but I'm not even a part of the family yet." I've got great news for you, the Bible says in Romans 10:13 whoever calls on the name of the Lord should be saved. Maybe you're that person today who needs to call on the name of the Lord. There's not a series of hoops you need to jump through, not a set of classes that you need to pass, you just need to cry out from your heart. Today as you make that cry, you don't have to do so out loud, you don't even have to use the same words or phrases that I might use, but maybe your cry out to God would go a little something like this, "God, today I'm here just to be honest with you. Lord, I've been deceitful for so many years about my relationship with you but today I'm gonna be honest, I'm the one who has messed up. I'm the one who has sinned. I'm the problem but I believe, O God, that Jesus Christ is the only solution to my sin problem. God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to born on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. God, today I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sin on his cross. And God, I believe, I believe that three days later when he rose from the dead, he made it possible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the problems of life but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you had that conversation with the Lord today. We'd love to celebrate with you just as we celebrated with those soldiers in that video. In just a moment as we stand and sing, if you would make your way to the front, we've got individuals who'd love to hear your story, pray with you and celebrate what the Lord is doing but maybe today, maybe today your decision isn't about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe it's about when you leave this place declaring that you're going to be the remnant, you're gonna be the one who stands faithful when everybody goes by the wayside, you're gonna be the one who's willing to stand in the face of opposition if it means standing for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, each and every one of us has a decision either today there's a decision that requires us to come forward or there's a decision that require us to be different when we leave. Help us, O God, to discern through your Spirit what you've called us to this day. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm gonna ask you to stand with me as Jimmy leads us, whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.