

Zephaniah (Selected verses)
August 2, 2015
2015 Summer Sermon Series

Zephaniah: The prophet with royal blood

"It's not fair!" How many times have you used those words or been around people who express those same thoughts. If you have ever raised a child, you have heard those words. *He got a bigger piece than me. Why didn't you punish her? Why does he get to stay up later? It's not fair!* We can look at the events that go on around us every day. A four-year old boy is trying to play a DVD on a TV, and the dresser, along with the TV comes down and kills him. A driver is killed, not because of his own actions, but because of the actions of someone else. We can think of many other situations that all of us have seen or experienced that we may have felt like saying: *It's not fair!*

There are people who look at God and God's judgment for sin and think: *"It's not fair!"* How could a loving God judge people? He wants me to be happy, right? The truth is that God's judgment on this world IS fair. God is a holy and just God. He can't stand sin. He is the exact opposite of everything that sin stands for. He says to each and every one of you: **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."** (Mt. 5:48) We fall short of God's standard of perfection – each and every day. We deserve to be judged by God. It is *fair* for God to destroy us for our sin. It would be fair for God to punish his people for their sins. They would suffer God's judgment for their idolatry.

God had tried to bring his people back to him. One of the people he used was a king named Hezekiah. 2 Kings describes Hezekiah in this way: **"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, ... He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it."** (2 Kings 18:2-4) Hezekiah had been ill and almost died. Yet, God looked down at Hezekiah and spared his life. Not only did he spare his life, he gave him 15 more years. After his death, the kings for the next several generations will go back to their sinful ways.

Fast forward several more generations. The great, great, grandson of Hezekiah is the prophet of Zephaniah. Zephaniah came from royal blood. Even though he was a descendant of Hezekiah, he was not king. The king was a man named Josiah. The children of Israel had gone back to their sinful ways. Yet even though Zephaniah was proclaiming God's judgment as a result of their sin, no one was listening to this prophet of royal blood. As a result, God was going to **"sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth, declares the Lord. "I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem."**

Are you a short term thinker or a long term thinker? Short term thinkers focus primarily on the here and now. Long term thinker looks at the big picture. Short term thinking is not always bad. But there are times that Satan will use short term thinking for his purposes. At times, short term thinkers can focus on our ego. What makes ME happy? What gives ME joy? What benefit does this give ME.? I want something NOW. Short term thinking began in the Garden of Eden. They wanted to be "like God," and they listened to Satan because they thought that they were missing out on something. It has continued since then. They ruined God's long term plan of blessing his perfect creation. Now, the long term plan changed. God would destroy his creation on account of their sin. The children of Israel at this time were short-term thinkers. Things just weren't all that bad for them. *That is just one more of God's prophets who were just saying more blah, blah, blah...*

Things were now a mess, and the mess needed to be cleaned up. One of the realities of being a parent is that you are often cleaning up someone else's mess. Toys will get scattered. Even if you teach your children to clean up their toys, they are going to do it perfectly. In order to clean it up "properly," you may end up helping picking up the mess. Imagine the mess that our sins must look like to God. He calls on us to love him perfectly, and we don't. And so, our heavenly Father sent His Son Jesus to clean up our mess. He paid the penalty for our sin. He cleaned up the sin mess. God wants us to once again to be full of joy – not just the joy that may come from our actions and lives. He wants us to know that true joy can only come from one place – from being with the God who created joy in the first place.

Following God's proclamation of judgment, God gives a promise of joy. **"Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. ... The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."**

Many years ago, when our children were young, we had stopped at a restaurant like Denny's to eat. As we were finishing our meal, we asked for our check. The waitress told us that our check was taken care of by the older couple who were seated a few tables away from. We, of course, thanked them for their generosity to us. They had done it as an act of kindness to us. Our bill was paid in full. God has paid our bill in full with the blood of his Son Jesus. We trust that promise of God through faith. That promise is there for all – whether we are royal blood or not.

May we give thanks that God is fair with his people. He has demanded a price for our sin that not a single person here could pay. And so, he needed to provide the most perfect and most fair solution to the problem of sin. His Son, Jesus. May we trust the words of Zephaniah: **"The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm."** Amen.