

Sin Is Ruin Zephaniah 2:1-3

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In the Bible, when God wanted to get His people's attention, He'd often do something demonstrative like speak from a burning bush, lead by a pillar of cloud, shake the ground or do a miracle in nature.

Besides these, God also spoke through people we call prophets. This morning I'm focusing again on a specific prophet and the message he was directed to bring to the people of God. His message wasn't just for them, but is important for us today.

Turn in your Bible to the Book of Zephaniah. Zephaniah's preaching and teaching gives the people a look into the future.

He is predicting the future and what God was going to do among His people and the nations around them if they did not change.

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In Zephaniah's prediction of the future, he doesn't mince words. He uses words like anger, destruction, desolation, destroy, distress, indignation, woe and wrath.

This does not bode well for the people of Judah and for the nations around them.

In Zephaniah 3:1-7, Zephaniah names the sins that plagued Israel, framing Israel's sin in terms of all things they DIDN'T do.

Zephaniah 3:1-5, "Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled! She obeys no one, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord, she does not draw near to her God. Her officials within her are roaring lions; her rulers are evening wolves, who leave nothing for the morning."

Her prophets are unprincipled; they are treacherous people. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law. The Lord within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame.”

First, Israel didn't obey the voice of God. No other people had received such communication, prophets and writings from God as did Israel.

Prophet after prophet had appeared with pronouncements, announcements and corrections from God. Yet we see time and time again, Israel wouldn't listen to the voice of the Lord.

Second, Israel didn't listen to God. This is a repeat from the first reason. God repeats Himself in case we don't get it! Israel didn't listen to the correction that came their way.

The Jews never seemed to understand why God allowed other nations to conquer them. We see this specifically in the Book of Judges, but it happened throughout the Bible even into the New Testament with Rome.

Third, Israel didn't trust in God. There were always idols at play with the people of God. The Israelites were always relying upon something else other than YHWH.

They relied on armies, alliances, walls and kings, but never seemed to understand that God was always ready to fight for them. Because they wanted to connect so much with the nations around them, they became just like them.

Fourth, Israel didn't draw near to God. This is a bit of a repeat from the third reason. Remember, God repeats Himself.

The people had no fellowship with God, and it showed. Their lives didn't match His way of life, but rather day-to-day they looked like everyone else.

So, Zephaniah brings words of gloom and doom because the people needed to be shaken from their sin and pointed in the direction of repentance and salvation.

In Zephaniah, we see that God didn't want His people, who are called by His Name, to be full of pride, ignore Him and not seek Him.

He wanted the opposite for His people just like He wants the opposite for us. Why? Because sin is ruin.

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Listen to Zephaniah 2:1-2, *“Gather together, gather yourselves together, you shameful nation, before the decree takes effect and that day passes like windblown chaff, before the Lord’s fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord’s wrath comes upon you.”*

The first thought we see in these verses is that sin is ruin. Sin, in form of idolatry and gross immorality, exposed the Jewish people to the terrible doom that was now hanging over them.

In fact, sin is the cause of all human suffering. Spiritual sin brings spiritual suffering; moral sin brings moral suffering; national sin brings national suffering.

When we studied the Book of Nahum two weeks ago, we learned that God doesn't get angry because He didn't get what He wanted for Jesus' birthday or that Satan threatened the archangel Gabriel a little too much on the playground.

God doesn't get angry for the reasons that you and I do. God gets angry at one thing: sin. God's anger is perfect anger and is directed at sin.

God's anger at sin is part of His holiness and perfection. It is never misdirected, sinful, out of place, out of proportion or out of control.

Zephaniah was preaching and teaching the people of Judah that, because they didn't obey the voice of God; because they didn't listen to God; and because they didn't trust in God or draw near to God that they are now the focus of His anger.

That truth is the same for us. How good are you at ignoring God? It may be that we, too, are not good at obeying the voice of God.

Having a Bible readily available, it could be that time and time again God has communicated something to you through His Word and you just didn't obey.

For example: It may be that we're a pro at praying and getting out our thoughts, feelings and requests, but then we "amen" before we listen to Him. Correction often comes in the listening.

Perhaps there are issues with your significant other, how you manage your money, how you treat your children or habits you may have, but you just don't listen to God as He tries to talk to you about it.

It may be that we don't really trust in God. You may have developed the skill of relying on yourself, your income, your own wisdom, a substance, sports, entertainment, or even family for fulfillment and direction in life.

We act like we trust in anything or anybody else but God and, because we wanted all those other things, we look and sound like someone who doesn't know God.

It may be that we don't want to draw near to God because, if we do, we'll have to change our living arrangements or change how we talk about other races.

We may have to change how we vote or how we spend our time, because we already know God isn't a priority and we don't want Him shining a light on that. Day-to-day we look like everyone else and we're comfortable with that.

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Zephaniah's message wasn't just about shedding light on the fact that the people were sinful or how many times they had omitted God from their lives, leading them to ruin, but his message also gives them a pathway back to God. He didn't leave us without hope!

In Zephaniah 2:3, the prophet's second thought is emphasizing repentance for Judah so they can find their way to God. He does the same for us. In so many words, Zephaniah is telling the people, and us, that repentance rebuilds the ruin.

Zephaniah 2:3, "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."

So, what is this spiritual pathway out of the ruin of sin and back to God? In verse 1, Zephaniah tells the people to *"gather together."*

To *"gather together"* are preparation words. I imagine them gathering together to worship, reading God's Word and praying.

But we must be careful. It's detrimental to meet together with other sinners who're only wanting to sin more. A sinner meeting with another sinner to sin goes down the broad path to destruction.

But there's something beneficial about meeting together with other sinners who're seeking to repent and focus on God. The Book of Hebrews says tells us:

Hebrews 10:23-27, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

If you're wanting to repent, the questions must be asked: Who do you hang around with the most? Do the people with whom you gather push you towards God or away from God?

Zephaniah, and the writer of Hebrews, knows repentance is more lasting and has strength if we surround ourselves with people who're also repenting and desire to encourage us.

Proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

We encourage them and they encourage us. We sharpen each other and let each other know that it's not good to deliberately sin.

In verse 3, Zephaniah shared with us a blanket statement, but then it got more specific.

This blanket statement in verse 3 is: *"Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger."*

Zephaniah said to “*seek righteousness*” as part of repentance. If the people of God wanted to repent, then they are to stop doing actions, habits and attitudes that are unrighteous. They are to begin to do actions, habits and attitudes that are righteous.

Repentance means to change. Repentance means a change of direction. More specifically, repentance means to change from unrighteousness towards a direction of righteousness.

The problem is that we don’t always know what direction to move. We realize that we’re stuck in a sin, but we aren’t sure how to change because we’re influenced so much by our culture and our culture mixes right and wrong like a cocktail.

This is where the Bible is essential. The Bible provides spiritual common sense. We can always look to the Bible because the Word of God always directs us to what is right, good and in God’s will.

The eternal Truth found in the Bible won’t steer you wrong. Now, it may be difficult or painful, but it won’t be wrong or the wrong path.

Hebrews 4:12, *“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”*

In verse 3, as part of repentance, Zephaniah said to “seek humility.” Here’s where repentance usually breaks down. Here’s where it broke down for Israel and here’s where it usually breaks down for you and me.

Once we come face-to-face with righteousness on the written page, where the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual common sense, we must decide to act. That’s repentance.

The problem is that we don't want to. We don't want to admit we made a bad choice. We don't want to admit that we conducted our romantic relationship backwards, according to God's Word.

We don't want to swallow our pride and confess that money is more important than God. We don't want to share that we only come to church to check a box on a list of things to do.

We don't want to admit that we live one way Monday through Saturday, and show up here on Sunday with a mask on. No... we don't want to do that.

James 4:10, "*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.*" Repentance requires us to let go of the morality our culture tells us our life should go and follow God's way.

Repentance means we humbly come before God and confess that the way we have been living has been according to our rules and not His.

Repentance means we knew what was right and good and we decided to do what everyone else was doing, ignoring God knowing full well we were sinning.

Repentance requires humbly confessing we chose to do wrong when we knew better. Repentance requires humbly admitting our addiction has gotten the better of us. Repentance requires humbly seeking the best way from God no matter how it feels.

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Conclusion

It could be that you, like the nation of Judah, are a pro at ignoring God and keeping Him in the background of your life. Perhaps you don't really want to listen to God. Today's message from Zephaniah is a call to change that.

Zephaniah's message is a call to repentance, so listen and lean into faith like never before. Make God the priority.

It could be that you, like the nations around Judah, do not know God. If this is true, then seek a relationship with Him by the blood of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.”