

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – November 7, 2023

The Lord be with you.

I'm hoping that by the time I'm through, that you're gonna be seen dancing, maybe even calling up a friend and celebrating the good news, that's because we're gonna take the next few moments to look at a couple of verses in the Old Testament that sound... well, they sound like they're coming from the New Testament as they are so filled with hope and good news, as they look to the coming of Jesus. I'm in the Old Testament book of Zephaniah. We don't spend a lot of time in Zephaniah, it's kind of hard to find in the Bible, but Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah, some 600 years before Christ coming, and he's looking into the future.

He's looking to the coming of Jesus and the coming of good news, and here is a picture of singing, dancing, celebration, and it's all a picture of our salvation. In Zephaniah 3:14-17, I read, rejoice and exalt with all your heart, O daughter, Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst. Okay, by the way, that's Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. The king of Israel, the Lord is in your midst. You shall fear disaster no more. On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem, do not fear, O, Zion, do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst. A warrior who gives victory. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will renew you in his love. He will exalt over you with loud singing as on a day of festival... Okay, because Jesus Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us has come.

These verses are for you and me. Two times in this passage, it says, God is in your midst. God is with you. It says that two times so two times it says, do not fear. Now, look at what Jesus Emmanuel, God with us has done in this passage, two things, it says, the Lord has taken away the judgements against you, that means that sinners are fully, completely forgiven. So that they need not fear God's judgments. The Lord has taken away the judgment against you, he has turned away your enemies. Of course, the ultimate meaning of this is that the enemies of sin and death are defeated, and so the Prophet calls upon God's people to rejoice and exalt with all your heart.

The word exalt here comes from a Hebrew word meaning, to jump for joy. This is the best news that you will ever hear, so just jump for joy, as the Lord has taken things in his hands, he has acted on your behalf as a Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he is turned away your enemies, so rejoice and jump for joy.

Now, I think we could probably just stop right here, this is a lot, but Emmanuel, God with us is done for us, but there's more... Verse 17, it says, The Lord your God is in your midst. A warrior who gives victory. He will rejoice over you with gladness. Picture a mother standing over her baby and rejoicing... That's God, as He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will renew you in His love.

Okay, I'm gonna say something about this word here that is translated as love is... We talk quite a bit about the Hebrew word chesed means covenant love, loyal love, faithful love, but this word translated as love, it's not chesed. It's the Hebrew word ahav. It's a passionate love. It's used for Jacob's love for Rachel or the love of David's wife, Michael for David. It's the love that Jacob

had for his son Joseph. As these are all pictures of God's love for you. The Lord will, it says, The Lord will renew you in love. God is making us into new people by His love, and God so loves you that he breaks into song, it says, The Lord will exalt over you with loud singing... The Hebrew word translated here is exalt. It is different from the one earlier that we looked at that had the idea of jumping for joy, the word here has the idea of a joy that it just makes your body want to move, it is a joy so wonderful that you can't stand still. You have to dance.

God will exalt over you with loud singing as on a day of festival, have you been so happy, you get good news, something good happens and you start singing. That's how God feels about you today. He will exalt over you with loud singing as on a day of festival, God is so happy, God is so in love with you that he can't contain himself. He's happy that that he is taken away all judgments against the way all your enemies. Now Isaiah was prophesying about the same time as Zephaniah. Listen to what Isaiah sees happening, in Isaiah 62:5, As the bride groom rejoices over the bride. So show your God rejoice over you.

That's how in love with you that God is... Now, I know that sometimes we project unto God the guilt and shame that we're feeling... We project that unto God. So how do you respond to this good news, that God is head over heels crazy about you? Can you rejoice in that? Are you thinking, Well, I'm not worthy. I'm just too guilty that God should rejoice over me. But did you hear what the text says? It says, the Lord has taken away the judgments against you. God rejoices that He has brought you close to him. Or maybe you're thinking, maybe you're awfulizing, well... Well, just look at all the problems I have. But God says, I have turned away your enemies, the Lord your God is in your midst. A warrior who gives victory.

I often talk to people who they think God is mad at them. And I don't deny that there are preachers who wanna leave you with that impression, but God loves you so much that He doesn't wanna be God without you. God loves you so much that he can't stop thinking about you. He can't stop rejoicing over you. He can't stop singing. That's not how some people think of God... But I join with Zephaniah today in saying, rejoice and exalt with all your heart, all your heart, because God is rejoicing over you.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler on the pilgrim way. Thanks for listening... until next time.