



Zephaniah Wk. 16
For Praise and a Name
By Pastor Jody May 08/23/2026

[CALL TO HEAR]

Zephaniah 3:18-20 ESV

- ¹⁸ I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,
so that you will no longer suffer reproach.
- ¹⁹ Behold, at that time I will deal
with all your oppressors.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
- ²⁰ At that time I will bring you in,
at the time when I gather you together;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes," says the LORD.
-

**Pastor – "People of God, this is the Word of God."
People – "Thanks be to God."**

Pray

Illustration

Ever have one of those friends that seems 'Bad Luck' is the only luck they know? That they can't for the life of them understand how bad things always happen to them? Because of that worldview, it was hard for them to see the blessings of God in their lives, times when they were spared bad consequences or times when they had a lot going for themselves. They could never put 2 and 2 together and figure out that the reason things have not gone well in their life was because of the decisions that they make. It's painful to watch because many times it's a good friend, or a close family member, or perhaps it was you when you looked in the mirror at some point in your life.



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That view, that is shared by many, was one of the things that drove me out of secular counseling field. People would come to me and ask for help to feel better emotionally all the while never accepting that the way they were making life decisions lacked any true wisdom. How disheartening it was to have to work around the problem of sin in someone's life, because they did not want to accept God and moral culpability for actions and would rather deal with tricks for emotional manipulation to help them cope with who they are in life ygdxyhxz. And now over the last 20 years of psychological history in the "West" we arrive at the modern emotional plague called "Victim Mentality" where one's problem exists outside of self alone.

Introduction

Tell me if you have ever heard this wisdom before?

Proverbs 14:12 ESV ([Proverbs 16:25](#))

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Some simple insights to this truth, a truth that God thought was so good that He decided to write it down twice for you. First there is more than one 'way' to go forward in life. Whether you believe in absolute Free Will or God's Providence over our decisions there are always options on what to do when we come to the proverbial fork in the road. Not choosing to act on something worried over it being the right choice, is making a choice not to act. The 'way' must be traveled, the 'way' must be experienced, and the 'way' is the only path to the next decision.

Second, the 'way' you will choose will seem right to you. This verse is simply pointing out that people when exercising their decisions will make choices based on what's best for them in the moment (see Proverbs 14-16). It is the pragmatic choice, the choice of least resistance and the choice of highest immediate reward.

Lastly, that's a choice that leads to death. That is, while it may not be an immediate deliverance to the grave, at the end of life one would be able to see that their choices are what led them to their demise. In other words, people



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are prone to wander, Lord, we feel it, prone to leave the God we love; hence why the [song](#) teaches here's my heart; O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.

The man that has gained wisdom, the man that has finally learned His lesson by recognizing that his decision making is faulty, is the man that has gone through the fires of adversity and has learned he can't save Himself. There's a need for someone on the outside of Him to seal his fate, to lead his steps, and to control the outcomes of his decisions making.

This is the truth that Zephaniah is putting his hope in. That the people of God, upon coming out of their judgement will have learned not to trust their heart in decision making when it comes to why they should follow God. He sees here at the end of his prophetic letter, a day where those that desire a 'way' of their own choosing still, will be turned over to that path. While those that have learned a lesson of humility after judgment, God will now do the leading, the restoring, and the removing of their shame. It was a promise for his people then and it is a promise for God's people now.

MP

The Lord humbles the proud oppressors, gathering and exalting His humbled people, removing shame and glorifying their name!

As we wrap up this short but powerful piece of scripture today, we are going to arrange it into 3 separate actions that the Lord takes on. Please note that all the accounts are spoken in 1st person, "**I WILL**", just like the beginning of this book where God says I will judge and then tells how it will happen. Now He says how 'I will' bless and tells how that will happen as well. All so that we know that Salvation comes from God alone, He gets the credit for a repentant people, Sola Deo Gloria, Amen!

1st we will see how the **Lord deals with the Proud Oppressors**, those that refuse to learn their lessons, that refuse God's Grace and give God's people headaches. **2nd** we will see how the **Lord Saves His Oppressed People**, and that means He doesn't just quiet them in love them, but He reverses what they have been oppressed by. **3rd** the **Lord Restores and Exalts His People**,



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the end is not merely rescuing but elevating the fate or conclusion of His people so that all see how He loved them.

1. The Lord Deals with the Proud Oppressors

¹⁸ I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,
so that you will no longer suffer reproach.

¹⁹ Behold, at that time I will deal
with all your oppressors.

You read on Friday in your reading plan in Nehemiah 8 that after the return of the exiles from Babylon after the 70 years of captivity, you saw their reaction to God's Grace based on His covenant, not their works. You first saw their grief over being made aware of what their forefathers (shepherds, governors, princes) had done in poor selfish leadership, through the reading of the law and what their forefather's refused to see as their bad decisions all caused by sinful hearts. Here's what they would have heard read to them by the High Priest Ezra (whom you also have gotten to know over the last couple of weeks):

Deuteronomy 30:1-4 ESV

30 "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, ²and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³then the Lord your **God will restore** your fortunes and have **mercy** on you, and **he will gather** you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.

Notice even in this covenantal language the return is based on God not them, it is not an 'if you return' but a 'when you return'. [Isaiah 44:28](#) said God would use Cyrus to send them back. Then according to Deut. He causes the return; He enforced both the curses and the blessings of the law. He says they will return, you and your children will obey, He will restore your good fortune, and He will have mercy on those He will have mercy on – **God is the one doing the Gathering 'I will' (v.19)**. Those people heard those words and were overcome



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with the knowledge and grace of God, and all the priests comforted their people that day. They told them don't cry, rejoice, the reason you understand this is because God is being gracious and is loving you, it is a day to celebrate ([Neh. 8:9-12](#)). Then the very next thing is they want to celebrate again the Feast of Booths, a week-long celebration and sabbath with no work, a weeklong Thanksgiving celebration ([Neh. 8:13-18](#))!

In Zephaniah God says **"I WILL"** gather those who mourn for the **festival (v.19)**/ religious ordinances, holidays, the ways of the true religion that the true believer wants to celebrate God with. But in doing so God is also going to separate out the **oppressors** this time. There are **two types** here in the text. There are the ones that hold the people of God in reproach that cause a burden in trying to live for God. Then there are those oppressors that are universal in scope those that are blatantly against God.

God makes a way for His people that want to worship Him by separating oppressive people that keep it from happening.

We saw this happen when they returned from Babylon, they started off good but eventually again men in their quest to make a 'way' outside of God sought control over the temple to control God's people (Rome/Herodian Dynasty). So we saw this in Jesus' day where God Worship could be practiced away from the temple in Synagogues, local gatherings shepherded by Rabbis and Pharisees, when the temple was run by [High Priests controlled](#) by those in authority and not of Aron's line. Then we see the end of Judaism and the rise of the church, the ["Ekklesia"](#) or the gathered followers of Christ that are called to come and gather in His name. God is constantly gathering His people together who want to observe His true ordinances and celebrate the sabbaths/feast days in His name and separates them from oppressive people. It is the continual Reforming of His church where we see God will always make a way for His people to experience His good will through gathering in His name.

Jesus, the Lord has made a 'way' now for us; by the HS we all are united, and those that worship God are drawn together by His presence. That began with God's action, even before we knew we wanted it, and God's work in gathering will continue until our final gathering in His name for all eternity. One of the



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great blessings about being in the people of God is the camaraderie built by His blood, through our shared corporate identity of being redeemed by His work, and the agreement found in the confidence in the work of Christ for our lives, all proclaimed by the worship and practice of the ordinances of the church. There is no better place to be on a Sunday than here with God's people. But there are those with other opinions.

That's the challenge for us today. For the church we always must be on the watch for those that want to use her people for their own good. There are people that go to a service every week, that see a good thing, but they are not ready to give up the way that seems right to them yet. Church family that is part of our responsibility given us by God to keep the wolves away from God's people. For example, some churches mass market single's ministry without ever requiring those that attend to be members of the church, it invites the wolves in to tear at the softest of lambs. As a church we all, not just the elders, are called to be on guard of those oppressive people that seek to burden its' congregants with their unrepentant ways. Is there a place for evangelism, you better believe it, I don't just want to use our sheep as bait. We can love our enemy as Jesus says to do, we just don't need to let them in the pen family until God calls them to be family.

When we conform to God's calling to gather, to become a set apart people, we will find strength in our family unity discovering oppressors on the outside can't hurt who you are on the inside, your identity is safe in Christ. To have a strong church is to have a safe place, where the taunts of the enemy on the outside fall dead to the ground like the taunts Nehemiah got this week from Sanaballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab. We will be too busy accomplishing God's things, caught up in God's plans, walking out God's ways to pay heed to those that seek to oppress God's people. The taunts of the oppressors never go away they just lose their power when you gather with God's people in Jesus' name.

Ok so the Lord deals with His people's oppressors and when He does so, He reverses many of the things that they received at the hands of their oppressors.



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2. The Lord Saves His Oppressed People

19b And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.

There is a pattern here in v. 19 that is a reflection of what God does for all believers at all times. **God moves His people from humiliation to exaltation.** No one comes to God without first experiencing what it is to be lost without Him. For some that is the realization that you have been wounded by those that were to care for you to lead you into a better life. For others it is finally coming to the realization that you are where you are currently, because of your decisions to follow your own ways, according to the rewards offered to your flesh. And let's not fool ourselves, I think it is safe to say that is almost always a combination of both. So that when we come to God, there also comes a person that is broken, that as the Lord describes in [Ezekiel 16:6](#), wallowing in your own blood, or as the poor man in the good Samaritan story ([Luke 10:25-37](#)), or as the prodigal son ([Luke 15:11-32](#)) lying in the filth of pigs. God's children are pulled out of their very much realized humiliation only to be exalted as one of His children. It is the story of a person that has received both the blessings and curses of this world to discover the God who saves.

God says, ***I will save the lame***, those that lack the power to care for themselves. Those that are left to the good will of others because they can't care for themselves and who are often overlooked. Those that are in desperate need we said last week of having their broken hearts set by God's physician hands. Family the truth of the Gospel speaks loud to us here. **God never asks us to come to Him after we have fixed ourselves, but that we come to God to be fixed.** A *lame man* cannot fix that which makes him broken by his own hands, there is no amount of pulling oneself up by your bootstraps that can fix you. The broken person, the humiliated person, sees the brokenness of their life and comes to God pleading to be healed and acknowledging only God can do it.



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God says, ***I will gather the outcast***, those that no longer have a place in society. We don't really experience this reality in our culture as they did in Zephaniah's day. Being an outcast was a death sentence; it is someone who has been banished. Like someone who was exiled out of the king's presence never to return or a person that ran to a city of refuge to escape judgment. It is a person that has no family and no people, a person that can't exist in the world anymore. The **Lord gathers together people in exile**, and out of a group of condemned souls, He makes a nation that bears His name. You see when we come to God, we were at one time excluded from His Kingdom by our tainted works and when God is ready for us to return home, we shall be shunned by the Kingdom of this world, and only by the work of our great ambassador Christ, are we brought back under the Grace of God.

So, what happens when God restores His people? ***He changes shame into praise, and renown in all the earth (v.19)***. It is the model we see in Christ's life. The world tried to label Him as a false Messiah. There had been others before Christ that tried to use that title and failed, so they compared Him to others that only sought their own good. The leaders of His people branded Him as a prophet that worked for Satan when Jesus would not even take His well-earned sabbath rest to save those in need. His own town disowned Him and drove Him off with the threat of murder if He came back. He had no place to lay His head, no earthly titles, and according to temple customs in that day by a fake priesthood He was shamed and by their hands He died in that shame, exiled out of their world.

Through the path of shame, He earned the praise of God and man, and became the most renowned person in all of the world, for all of time. He suffered for us, so that we could be healed, so we could be brought back home, and now in His name, we stand. So, friends don't be put out if people belittle your name, it is just God's way of turning your shame into praise for His Son. It is God's way of making known to this world that God alone has the power to save, and it has to be that way, for what other event, but bringing the outcast/lame/dead could call broken people home? The world must see broken and humiliated people put together again by God, so that those that would call Him Lord may see too the path of their Salvation, the true 'way', to



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see the decision that they have neglected for so long. Surrendering one's life to Jesus and be saved.

The Lord saves His oppressed people by **moving them from humiliation to exaltation**.

3. The Lord Restores and Exalts His People

²⁰ At that time I will bring you in,
at the time when I gather you together;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes," says the LORD.

So here in v. 20, the last words from Zephaniah, it is the doubling down on what he just said in v.19. Just like Proverbs 14:12 & 16:25 it was so important that it had to be said twice. The news is so great, that what you are being offered is the chance to pray this through, if v.19 did not speak to you. But there are some extra lines here at the end that perhaps will help you see the bright future of where this is all going, on the **Day of the LORD**.

He says **at that time**, a time when those he has gathered, those He has caused praise and renown to fall on already. It shall be known, **among all the peoples (nations) of the earth**. That phrase is a little different than *in all the earth* (v.19). One pertains to distance that the message travels (19) and the fame it brings and the other (20) pertains to a total number – *peoples of the earth*. Family when is there a day that we know of when all the peoples gather, and fortunes are given that are the blessings of God's Kingdom Life? Not only that, but Zephaniah said we would see it – *Before your eyes*. Theologians agree that therefore this message is not meant just for the people in Zephaniah's day, nor just for those that return to Jerusalem years later. *Before your eyes* means those that have been long dead, so when will they see this day?

Revelation 7:9-10;13-17 ESV



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A Great Multitude from Every Nation

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a **great multitude** that no one could number, from **every nation**, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

All fortunes have been restored in the sight of all people of all the saints for they have come back to life. At last, the curse of being exiled/made an outcast of the Garden, has been reversed. The curse of Babel has been reversed, God has brought Heaven down to earth to make a new capital where a perfected people come not to exalt their own names, but by their existence exalt the name of God. We have been given a new body to accompany our resurrected spirit, and now we shall live as a people, with our King in our midst, forever enjoying all the restored fortunes we had in the beginning. And all will praise God when they see the saints He has brought through the tribulation of this fallen world. **Truly the Lord shall restore and exalt His people.**

MP

**The Lord humbles the proud oppressors, gathering and exalting His
humbled people, removing shame and glorifying their name!**



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[CALL TO OBEY]

1. Cultivate a Sanctified Home Assembly: Since the Lord gathers those who mourn for the ordinances, we must ensure our homes are centers of true religion. Fathers, take the lead in establishing a rhythm of daily family worship that prepares the heart for the Lord's Day. Protect your household from the 'oppressors'—the worldly influences and unbiblical mentalities mentioned in the sermon—that seek to distract or erode the family's devotion to the worship of God. Guard your family's time and hearts as if you are preparing them to stand before the throne.

2. Practice Humility and Repentance in Decision Making: Recognize the danger of the 'way that seems right to a man.' We must actively mortify our pride and the tendency toward victim mentality. When we face trials, we should stop looking for external excuses and instead seek the 'physician's hand' of the Lord. As heads of homes, model this by bringing your own failures and burdens directly to the Lord in prayer, teaching your children that our hope is not in self-correction, but in the total, gracious restoration provided by Christ alone.

3. Stand Firm in Corporate Identity: We are a people gathered by the King, distinct from the world. In the face of modern taunts or societal pressure, do not be swayed by the 'reproach' of the world. Find your strength and security in the camaraderie of the church. Support your elders in maintaining the purity of the membership and the fellowship, ensuring that our local body remains a safe, set-apart place where the redeemed may worship in spirit and truth. Know that your identity is hidden in Christ, and therefore, you need not fear the temporary shame cast upon you by a fallen culture.

Prayer

Almighty and Everlasting God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, we come before Your throne of grace acknowledging that You alone are the Author of our salvation, you are the **"I will"** that gets it done. We confess that our 'ways' have often led us into the wilderness, and so we repent of the pride



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that keeps us from resting solely in Your Grace. We thank You for gathering us into Your fold, for the gift of the church, and for the promise that You are the one who removes our shame and secures our future. Grant us the courage to lead our families in the paths of righteousness, to guard our homes against the encroachment of the enemy, and to walk in the humility of the Gospel. We wait with eager expectation for that final Day, when all Your people shall be fully restored in the sight of all. Strengthen our hands and our hearts to persevere in the truth of Your Word, until we stand complete in Your presence.

And Lord we also ask for those of our family and friends who yet cannot see that their decisions have failed them in trying to make their own way in this world. Father as you have been merciful to us, please consider these outcasts as well and extend your grace and mercy to them. Show them the value and power of your name through Christ and through His work in our lives. My friend if that is you today, you too can know the healing of what makes you lame, you can experience the removal of your shame, and you can receive the eternal love of God. Call on Him today, ask Him to receive you through the work of His Son, plead for the forgiveness of sins, and seek to follow Him, and He will make your way straight and clear.

In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Communion

Luke 22:19-20 ESV

"And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Today when we take the bread Jesus told us *this is His body, which was given for us*. The Lord of His own free will, for the Glory of God alone, gave of Himself freely, not under compulsion but as a willing participant in the quest to earn us the right to be called children of God. By His life's achievements not only do we gain the righteousness we needed but we gain a home in



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eternity with all the other saints and the ability to bring Him the praise He deserves forever. Praise be to our King who reigns and rules over forever those He saves.

Today when we drink the juice, Jesus told us, *this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*. The only blood that had the value to ensure our forgiveness and deliverance from sin was His, it binds us together, removing our shame, and preserves us all the way to the Day of the Lord. It gives us the right to sit in His presence on that Day, when we all with one voice will be able to tell others of the sin He saved us from, and of the new life that He gave. All praise to our eternal King who with perfect love sealed our fate of being with Him forever.

[CONFESSION OF FAITH]

* The Congregation will stand and recites:

LBCF 1689 Chapter 5 Of Divine Providence Paragraph 5 God Often Disciplines or Tests His Children

The perfectly wise, righteous, and gracious God often leaves his children to various temptations and the sinfulness of their own hearts:

- to discipline them for their former sins, or
- to teach them the hidden strength of the sinfulness and deceitfulness of their hearts,

for the purpose of humbling them. He also does this:

- to lead them to more closely and constantly depend upon him for their support,
- to make them more cautious against future temptations to sin, and
- for other just and holy purposes 15

Therefore, whatever happens to any of his elect is because of his decree and happens for his glory and their good. 16



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15. 2 Chronicles 32:25-26, 31; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9

16. Romans 8:28

[OFFERING+LAST SONG]

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, who removes our shames and restores our fortunes by His Grace alone.

Go in the name of the Son, who bore our shame and the consequences of an outcast so that we may become a citizen of Heaven.

Go in the name of and power of the HS, that opens our eyes to the fact our all of our lives can be used to make much of God, now go and share with this world what our Great God has done for you.



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[FELLOWSHIP CONVERSATIONS]

1. The Trap of Self-Guidance: In what areas of your life; work, parenting, or financial decisions—do you find it most tempting to lean on your own wisdom ('ways') rather than seeking the clear counsel of Scripture and the leadership of your brothers and sisters?
2. Guarding the Household: We are called to keep the 'wolves' out of the pen of the church and our families. Practically speaking, how can we as fathers and heads of homes better identify the modern 'oppressors' or worldly ideologies that threaten to distract our families from faithful worship?
3. From Shame to Praise: The text tells us that God changes our shame into praise. Can you share a time when you were personally brought low by your own sinful choices or worldly circumstances, and how God's grace specifically intervened to redirect your heart toward praise instead of despair?
4. Corporate Sanctification: How does the concept of our 'shared corporate identity' in Christ change the way you view your responsibility to the other families and members within our local church?
5. Looking toward the End: We have the promise that one day all fortunes will be restored before our eyes. How does a Revelation 7 perspective or a heaven-focused perspective help you endure the current 'tribulation' or minor sufferings we face in a culture that often stands at enmity with God?



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