Zephaniah 3:17 *He Takes Great Delight in You: He will Rejoice!*

***The John 3:16 of the OT***Greg Louganis was one of the world's top divers from the 1980's and 90's. He was once asked how he coped with the stress of international diving competition. He replied that as he climbed to the board, he would always take a deep breath and then think:

"Even if I blow this dive, my mother will still love me."

Then he would go to the edge of the board and go for excellence.

It’s always good to know that we can count on our parents’ love. But even parental love can sometimes go wrong. Even better for us to know that God loves us. To know, even if we blow it, God’s love will not go away.

Today we are going to focus on one of the Bible’s best verses for telling us about God’s love. It’s a verse I’ve shared with you the last two weeks—in a way I’ve been teasing you with it—but it is my intention to really soak in this verse today. I want you to hear this verse as God talking about you. The verse is **Zephaniah 3:17:**

17The 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. (NIV, 1984)

I read a commentator this week who called this verse the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. John 3:16, of course, is the verse that says God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life. It is rightly famous because it talks about how much God loves us. And this verse, also, is all about God’s love for us. It’s a beautiful–five beautiful pictures, actually--of how much God loves us.

Quick story: this week Lori, our church administrator, and I went to a meeting in Orange City at the First Reformed Church. On one of their walls, they have what they are calling a “life verse” project. They’ve invited the members of the church to write on the wall the Bible verse that carries the most meaning for them. It’s a neat project, and it was a striking visual. And as Lori and I stopped to admire it, do you want to guess the first verse that I noticed? Zephaniah 3:17. Someone had pinned it up there front and center.

If you knew this verse before we started on this series, I hope it was already one of your favorites. If it is relatively new to you, I hope that after today it will be one that you savor and treasure.

But before we dig into it, I need to do a little review and set the context.

***Skillfully Written***We’ve spent the last two weeks in the little book of Zephaniah. We’ve seen that Zephaniah was a prophet for God at a time when the nation of Judah was in need of serious reform, and so we’ve seen that his book is filled with depictions of coming judgment. He talks about a coming “day of the LORD” when Judah will be punished for its sins. But, more than just a prediction of distress for God’s people, Zephaniah also describes coming destruction for all of mankind.

In fact, we didn’t really look at chapter 2 after verse 3, but if you would look at it you would see that there are warnings for the nations that surround Judah as well—nations like Philistia and Moab and Assyria. The point seems to be that there is nowhere to go to escape God’s wrath—if you drew a map of the world at the time you would see that the countries named represent the four points of the compass surrounding Judah—north, south, east, west, there is no safe place. And also, God seems to be saying that while these nations will be used in Judah’s punishment, that doesn’t mean that He is overlooking their sins.

The point, as we’ve been saying, is that Zephaniah is an angry little book. But, as we saw last week, it is meant as a warning. The book is really like a Bridge Out sign—a U-Turn sign—urging the people to change before it is too late. We saw that Zephaniah 2:3 is the heart of the book, calling on the people to seek the LORD, to seek righteousness, and to seek humility. The humble of the land who heed the warning can still be sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger.

Which leads us to **Zephaniah 3:9**. Zephaniah 3:9 is really the hinge point of the book. This is where the book switches from warning to promise. This is what will happen for those who turn-around, those who seek their shelter in the LORD. Here’s what it says:

**9**“Then I will purify the lips of the peoples,  
    that all of them may call on the name of the LORD  
    and serve him shoulder to shoulder.

Notice the line that says “all of them may call on the name of the LORD.” That corresponds to the instruction to “seek the LORD.” Then, **verse 11:**

**12**But I will leave within you  
    the meek and humble.  
The remnant of Israel  
    will trust in the name of the Lord.

This verse matches up with the instruction to “seek humility.” God is going to leave a remnant. Those who are humble enough to trust in the LORD. Those will be the ones who are sheltered. Then, **verse 13** matches up with the plea to seek righteousness:

**13**They will do no wrong;  
    they will tell no lies.  
A deceitful tongue  
    will not be found in their mouths.  
They will eat and lie down  
    and no one will make them afraid.”

A day of judgment and wrath is coming; but it will also be a day of salvation. For those who heed the warning—for the faithful remnant—God promises security and safety.

Which leads to **Zephaniah 3:14-17.** Here is the lead up to our great verse:

**14**Sing, O Daughter Zion;  
shout aloud, O Israel!  
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,  
O Daughter of Jerusalem!  
 **15**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.  
 **16**On that day  
     they will say to Jerusalem,  
 “Do not fear, Zion;  
     do not let your hands hang limp.  
 **17**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.” (NIV, 1984)

You’ll notice that I formatted these verses a little differently on the screen. I did that because I want you to see how skillfully this is written. I want you appreciate the beauty of the scripture in front of us.

Take a look at the **first few lines of verse 14**, and then pay attention to the last few lines of verse 17. Notice how they parallel each other. The words “sing” and “rejoice”. In verse 14, daughter Zion is supposed to sing, in verse 17 God sings.

Then, move in one indent. **The beginning of verse 15** and the second line of verse 17. “The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy.” And verse 17: “he is mighty to save.”

Then, move in one more indent. **The middle of verse 15** and the first line of verse 17. “The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you.” “The LORD your God is with you.”

The similarities in these lines is not by accident. This is something known as a “chiasm.” C-H-I-A-S-M. That comes from the Greek letter “chi”, which looks like our letter “X”. **If we put an X over the passage**, you can see how the indents follow the legs of the X. This is a fairly common literary technique in ancient Hebrew, and it shows the skill of the writer. These lines were put together not only to tell us about God, but to do so in an interesting and beautiful way.

**And often, when this kind of** literary device is used, a key part of the message is found right in the middle—the hinge lines, if you will. And here, we see that the central lines are verse 16:

**16**On that day  
     they will say to Jerusalem,  
 “Do not fear, Zion;  
     do not let your hands hang limp

Delivered from fear, the people of God will be renewed for action, freed for activity, saved to serve. Instead of letting their hands hang limp, they will be able to raise them in prayer, praise and worship.

That, then, is the setting for our verse.

Now we are going to focus in on **Zephaniah 3:17**. There are five lines to this verse, and each one paints a compelling picture of God and His love. We’ll take them line by line.

***With You***First, we get a picture of God as **the Great Presence.** “The LORD your God is with you.”

What a promise this is! The LORD, the great King of Israel, is with you.

For the original audience, this would have been a reminder of the significance of the temple in Jerusalem. From their first days as a nation, when they marched away from Mt. Sinai, Israel has been known as the people who have God in their midst. First the tabernacle, and later the temple, were the physical reminders that God was with them.

But one of the implications of the coming disaster predicted by Zephaniah is that the temple will be destroyed. As a point of fact, that’s what happened. Just one or two generations after Zephaniah, the Babylonians came in and desecrated the Holy Place. The question then was inevitable: was God abandoning His people?

Zephaniah’s re-assurance here is that for the remnant, for those who seek shelter in the LORD, God has not gone away. He will continue to be with them.

And, of course, for those of us who live on this side of the New Testament, it’s hard to miss a prediction of Jesus Christ. Zephaniah doesn’t use the name “Immanuel”, but the language is similar. “Immanuel”—one of the names the New Testament gives to Jesus (Matt. 1:23) means “God with us”. One of the greatest things we believe as Christians is that God came to dwell in our midst—not just as a cloud representing God’s presence—but as a man in flesh and blood. God came to earth to experience life as we do; and more than that He has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts of all who believe in Him.

The picture here, then, is a God who is always with us. He is here with us in all the details, all the frustrations, all the disappointments of everyday life. He is here. How comforting is it to know that whatever comes our way in life, we do not face it alone?

God is with us.

He is with you.

***Mighty to Save***Second, we get a picture of the **Victorious Warrior**. The second line: “He is mighty to save.”

I’ve described this verse as a great declaration of God’s love for us. But before we start to think that God’s love is some sort of soft, sentimental emotion; we are reminded that God is a mighty warrior.

This is our God. The word used here is the same as that used to describe David’s mighty men—men who reach nearly comic book status in the descriptions of their valiant acts. In other words, God is a mighty hero. He is the defender of the weak and the fatherless. And the express purpose of this mighty warrior is to save his people.

I don’t know how often you think of salvation as a battle, but from the moment Jesus was baptized until the day He was crucified, it was a fight. He fought Satan in the wilderness, and He fought Satan on the cross. And at every step of the way, there was warfare against disease, against emotional disruption, against death, against all the powers of hell and all the effects of sin because the God who comes to us is the God who comes to save us. And He is a God who fights for His people.

Last year--and this is no surprise, because it happens just about every year now—four out of the top 10 movies in terms of box office receipts were superhero movies. (5 out of 10 if you want to count *Star Wars*). We love superhero movies. We can’t get enough of them. And not just here, but around the world. Our superhero movies are one of America’s top exports.

Why do we love superhero stories so much? I think it’s because all of us know deep down inside we cannot save ourselves and we long to be rescued. I think that’s why they’re always the top grossing movies. We cannot save ourselves and we long to be rescued. And what God is saying through His prophet right now is, “There is a mighty hero coming who will fight for you, who will save you, who is better than any superhero story you could ever dream up. And He will rescue you. And the only qualification is: you have to know that you can’t save yourself. That’s all that’s required.”

That’s the picture of God here. A Victorious Warrior. Mighty to save. And He is fighting for you. You.

***Delighted***Third, there is a picture of God as **the Delighted Lover**. The third line: “He will take great delight in you.”

We’re looking at this verse as a description of God’s love for us. Generally, in the Old Testament, when it talks about God’s love there is a specific Hebrew word that gets used: C*hesed*. It’s a great word. I’ve talked about it before. *Chesed* is usually translated as “loyal love” or “unfailing love.” It’s one of the Hebrew forerunners for the New Testament concept of grace.

But in this verse, when a word for love is used in the next line, it’s not the word *Chesed*. Instead, it’s a word for love that is more often used for human relationships. It’s the word that is used to describe Jacob’s passionate love for Rachel, and Michal’s love for David. It’s also the word used to describe the love of Jacob for his favorite son Joseph.

The image of God here, then, is the image of a groom waiting for his bride. If you’ve ever been married, and you’ve experienced that flutter of heart that comes from standing at the front of the church and waiting for your bride to appear at the aisle. Or, if you were the bride, and you remember how it felt to see your groom standing by the altar, waiting for you to arrive—then you understand the picture that is being painted here.

Or, put it another way: if you can imagine how it feels to be a first-time parent, walking down the hospital hallway, holding that tiny infant in your arms, then you can relate to what’s being described of God here. Delight.

Your love over that child--there’s no way to put it into words, is there? You’re just quietly contemplating the fullness of emotion, the overflowing fullness of love and delight that you have in that child. And God says, “That is how I am with you. That is how I feel towards you.”

We don’t often think of God being delighted, but that’s what this verse is saying about Him. He takes great delight in you. You. He’s passionately in love with you.

***Quiet***Then, fourth. **The Comforting Father.** The fourth line: “He will quiet you with his love.”

The first week we were in Zephaniah, I introduced the series by telling a story about a father getting up to comfort his colicky infant daughter at 2 in the morning. That’s the picture I think is being painted here: a tired and exhausted parent who is so in love with the squirming, cranky infant in his arms that all he can do is helplessly sing a lullaby over her. A lovesick father who would do absolutely anything for his little girl.

Now, if you have been paying attention, you’ve noticed that whenever I have put this verse up on the screen, I’ve been using the NIV 1984 edition. This line is the reason. The newest edition of the NIV, and other modern translations render this line differently. It’s not because there is any controversy about which Hebrew words belong here; but there is disagreement about how best to render them in English.

The 2011 NIV has this line as “in his love he will no longer rebuke you”. Other translations have it as “he will be silent in his love” (Motyer, p. 955). As much as I understand the ins and outs of Hebrew translation, there are good reasons for those other lines; and it doesn’t change the meaning in any substantial way.

But to me, it loses a lot of the poetry. The idea of God being silent over us, before bursting out into joyful song, is evocative as far as it goes. But it misses the power of a father comforting his distressed child. It seems to me, anyway, that God wants us to understand how tender His love is for us.

If we are the fussy infant, if we are the child who is scared or distressed or in pain, then God is our tender Father who holds us gently in His arms and quiets us with His love.

And, by the way, quick aside: two weeks ago when I told that story about the colicky baby, I did a Google search of “colic” just to make sure I described it accurately. Ever since then, when I use YouTube to listen to music, the advertisements I have been getting have been for products to soothe a crying child. I’m getting ads for bottle warmers and infant swings and swaddling clothes. Google is apparently convinced I have a cranky child at home. It’s spooky.

***Loud Singing***The fifth picture, then, is **the Joyous Singer**. The final line: “He will rejoice over you with singing.”

Do you feel the wonder of this line? Do you feel how amazing this is? In a lot of ways I feel like everything we’ve been doing in the sermons the last three weeks have been leading up to this moment. The reason we needed to talk about God’s anger over sin; the reason we needed to hear the warnings to turn around; is so that we feel just how amazing this line is. God sings! God rejoices with singing! And He sings over His people!

A few weeks ago, in the *Force of Habit* series, we talked about some of the reasons it is important for us to sing when we gather. We talked about how singing helps us to express our emotions towards God. When we think of singing, we think of ourselves singing to God.

But here, it’s the opposite. God is singing over us! God is using music to express his joy and delight in us!

Can you imagine what it would be like if you could hear God singing? John Piper writes:

When I think of the voice of God singing, I hear the booming of Niagara Falls mingled with the trickle of a mossy mountain stream. I hear the blast of Mt. St. Helens mingled with a kitten's purr. I hear the power of an East Coast hurricane and the barely audible puff of a night snow in the woods. And I hear the unimaginable roar of the sun 865,000 miles thick, one million three hundred thousand times bigger than the earth, and nothing but fire, 1,000,000 degrees centigrade, on the cooler surface of the corona. But I hear this unimaginable roar mingled with the tender, warm crackling of the living room logs on a cozy winter's night.

And when I hear this singing I stand dumbfounded, staggered, speechless that he is singing over me. He is rejoicing over my good with all his heart and with all his soul (cf. [Jeremiah 32:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2032.41))! <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-pleasure-of-god-in-the-good-of-his-people>

Can you feel the wonder that the Lord exults over you with loud singing?

Grasp it, revel in, relish it--for it is true of all who trust in Christ. Almighty God finds you a delight, a joy, a source of unending happiness and heart-bursting elation. Here is the deep inner joy and personal satisfaction of God himself in you and me.

Soak this in: we have a God who loves us, with a deep passionate heart bursting love.

God sings.

God sings with joy.

God sings with joy over you!

***Implications***  
How do we respond to this great love of God for us! What do these pictures of God do for us? I have two things:

**1. Receive this love.**

Other religions have you serving God with a constant worrying thought: "Is He happy yet?"

Not ours.

We're never good enough, but he still loves us. God has told us here in the most striking of images how he feels towards his people.

This verse does not minimize our sin and shortcomings, but it reminds us that our God is not standing there with a big stick to batter us; but when we fail and know we have failed and come to him - we find love and delight in us.  
  
"Even if I blow this dive, my mother will still love me."   
  
At the beginning of each day, how good it would be for each of us to take a deep breath, say, "Even if I blow it today, my God will still love me," and then, assured of grace, go into the day seeking a perfect 10!

**2. Rejoice in this love.**

We are called to rejoice in the love of the one who rejoices over us.

If **we go back to the chiasm** I showed you at the beginning, I can’t help but to notice that the parallel to the line about God singing over us is an invitation to the people of Israel to sing and shout aloud to God. Verse 14:

**14**Sing, O Daughter Zion;  
shout aloud, O Israel!  
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,  
O Daughter of Jerusalem!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, because the LORD, the King of Israel is with you. He is a mighty warrior, strong to save. As a bridegroom delights in His bride, He delights in you. As a father comforts His child, He quiets you. He rejoices over you—YOU!—with singing.

Sing! Shout aloud. Be glad and rejoice with all your heart over the God who loves you!