

Zephaniah 3:14-18 ⁴ Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more. ¹⁶ In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. ¹⁷ The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing." ¹⁸ "I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly, Who are among you, To whom its reproach is a burden."

Music changes from generation to generation. Instruments change. The vocals change. Even the subjects of which music sings change. What one generation considers musical gold, the next considers a musical blunder. But one thread seems to run throughout the generations. Every generation loves a good love song. Love seems to just break forth in song. And songs love to bring forth love. A good love song can even bring the generations into agreement that a fine musical masterpiece has been created. Yes, everyone loves a good love song. And what Zephaniah tells us today is that even God loves a good love song. No it is not that God tunes into our radio stations and has a great time. But rather as He looks over His saints who remain faithful, He breaks out in song. And His singing is contagious. As God sings, it is hard for us not to sing right along. Yes, today the picture we get from the prophet Zephaniah is one of a grand musical, where God croons out a beautiful love song to us, and we respond with our own song. This is why in this Advent season we look so forward to our Lord's return: because everyone loves a good love song, and on that day there will be a great love song sang.

If all of the prophet Zephaniah's word were just as beautiful and poetic as they one we had in our text today, I suppose they might appear more often in our lectionary. As it stands, you will not hear another word from the prophet Zephaniah from our lectionary until three years from now when we come back upon this same text in the Advent season of 2006. This is the only text in our three year lectionary from Zephaniah. So in fairness to this prophet already diminished by being called referred to as one of the Minor

Prophets, today we must understand how we get to our text today. What was the message of Zephaniah that leads us to God's love song in our text?

Zephaniah was prophet that lived about 700 years before Christ. He was called primarily to speak a word of judgment against the nation of Judah. Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, had been ruled by two awful kings, and their disregard of God had spread from royalty right down to pauper. The people mixed the worship of the true God with their worship of other gods. The kings set up alternate places to worship other than the temple where God has commanded that He be worshipped. Even the nation's blessings had become curses. The people of the nation in general had much wealth. But that wealth caused the people to feel little dependence upon God. They seemed to have everything, why did they need God? They even jested at God saying, "He will do nothing, neither good nor evil."

We could say that the nation had major first commandment issues. They had god upon gods they had placed before the one true God. If it wasn't the gods of the other nations, it was the god of money that they placed their fear and love and trust in. They honestly believed that their gold and silver could protect them from anything, even God's judgment. But God message was clear. Judgment was coming that wouldn't be stopped by wealth or arrogance. No his wrath would clear the world of all disobedience.

The prophet Zephaniah declared that there were two ways in which people could respond to God's rebuke. They could continue in sin and be destroyed on the great day of the Lord. Or they could repent and hope that God would hide them in that great day. Many went the way of stubborn apathy toward God and His ways. But the prophet Zephaniah promised there would also be some, a few, a remnant who would repent and trust in God alone. Those God would gather back together and bless with abundance. It was those people that would be sung over by God. It was the remnant that would shout forth in exaltation, which would sing a song back to God in joy. Only the faithful, humble, repentant remnant could hope to hear a love song from God.

I doubt many of us have officially welcomed a foreign God into our homes officially. I trust that there are no statues of Buddha in your home or shrines to Allah, the Muslim god. But in a sense, we are in a time that is very similar to that of the time when Zephaniah prophesied. We live in a time of great prosperity. Oh sure, we can talk about an economic slump. But even when our American economy is slumping, we live better than probably anyone in any time past has ever lived. And when times are good, it is easy to forget about God on a day to day basis. Humans have a way of relying on God only until they feel comfortable with relying on themselves. Especially in a season that has become the season of want, it is easy to place our happiness in the amount of gifts we can buy or receive. But our happiness does not come from things. No today we confess again that our happiness will come from only one thing. We will be happy when we hear a love song from our God and we are able to respond with one of our own. We know that we will only be happy when God is again in our midst, when He has removed His judgment from us, when He has brought us that final salvation on that final day. Then will we sing for joy.

As we continue throughout Advent season, we must be ever watchful for other things in our lives which might take the place of God. We watch our lives carefully so that our hope lies in one thing alone. Our hope lies in the fact that the God with which we are blessed to walk humbly with shall return, and when he does, a love song shall be commenced. After taking a moment of quiet to ponder His own love for us, he will begin to sing. The words of the hymn we will sing after the Lord's Prayer might well give us an insight into what that song might sound like. God might well sing, "Comfort, Comfort ye my people, speak ye peace," thus saith our God. Comfort those who sit in darkness, mourning 'neath their sorrows load. Speak ye to Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them. Tell her that her sins I cover, And her warfare now is over."

And awestruck at the beauty of his love song to us, we sing back in the words of our closing hymn, "Lord, Thee I love with all my heart; I pray Thee ne'er from me depart, With tender mercies cheer me. Earth has no pleasure I would share, Yea, heaven itself

were void and bare If Thou, Lord, wert not near me. And should my heart for sorrow
break, My trust in Thee no one could shake. Thou art the Portion I have sought; Thy
precious blood my soul has bought. Lord Jesus Christ, My God and Lord, my God and
Lord, Forsake me not! I trust Thy Word.”

Amen.