

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. You may be seated. We don't often get to hear from the book of Zephaniah, so let's start right there. Zephaniah was a prophet around the same time as Jeremiah. So he was preaching and prophesying about the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity, the Israelites being taken into Babylon for the 40 years. And so he is one who is of the prophets, like all of the prophets, preaching the judgment of God. And yet Zephaniah is one of the last prophets that we have listed in the scriptures. There's only Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi that follow after them. So it's towards the end of the Old Testament. And Zephaniah has many passages, a lot of passages, even more than a lot of the other prophets about the coming Messiah. And so remember, he's preaching that the people of God are going to go into exile. And yet he says, "Sing aloud, oh, daughter of Zion. And shout oh, Israel, rejoice and exalt with all your heart. You're going into exile for 40 years." What? Wait a second. Why am I rejoicing about this? What is this to be rejoicing about? Okay, it's not of course the exile. It's not of course the judgment of God. It is this, that his judgment will not last against him and he will take it away. In other words, you are being judged right now for your disobedience, but God is going to send someone who will take your judgment away. So even if you are facing the consequences of your rebellion against God, do not lose heart. Trust in his word. And there is still hope and there's still opportunity to rejoice. What you see may be horrible and what you experience may be a struggle, but you can still rejoice because you know that God has taken his judgment away through Jesus Christ.

Now, obviously they didn't know about Christ, but they knew the promise of Christ. They knew that God had said somebody was going to come. So he tells them to look forward to that day, that day when God will come and he will gather the outcasts and he will change their shame to praise. He will bring renown back to the people and he will restore their fortunes. This is what we have to look forward to. This is what they were looking forward to, and this is what Christ fulfilled. And then that leads right into the Philippians where it says, "Rejoice in the Lord always." And again, I will say rejoice, which is wonderful. We rejoice in the Lord always. Now, what does that mean? Right after that, it says, "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone." Again, rejoice and reasonableness. Where is this shift and why? We rejoice and we are reasonable or that it means gentle. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. As Luther says, when we think of someone or when we speak of someone, explain everything in the kindest way.

So in other words, we rejoice in the Lord. And that leads us then to speak kindly and gently to everybody that we come in contact with, even and especially those who irritate us. We're to be gentle, we're to be reasonable, we're to be kind, and we're to be forgiving of one another. Why? Well, because the Lord has promised to

take away our judgment. And if he has taken away our judgment, then he has also taken away theirs and they deserve the same grace that we deserve. Not because we have earned it, but because God has promised that he loves all people of all generations, of all nations. Not just one small group, but everyone. And so therefore, because he has loved us and because we have his grace, as he says later on, and because we have his peace, which surpasses all understanding. Because we have all of that, we can be gentle and kind and forgiving to one another.

Now, that's easier said than done. I realize it can be quite a challenge to be reasonable when the people are really irritating around you and being unreasonable. I mean, let's face it, I had an experience recently where I realized I'm not nearly as good at this as I'd like to. I'm getting ready to cross over one of the two-lane highways and go to the other side, and there's traffic coming the other way. And I got two or three cars in front of me. And I see multiple times where I could have made it across, but the people in front of me did not.

And I'm just... Well, you can ask my daughter how I reacted, but I was not exactly the calmest and most reasonable at that point. And that's just one simple example. It's amazing how many examples involve driving that help us understand our unreasonableness and our frustration with humanity. But we are called to be gentle and kind and loving to one another because God has been gentle and kind and loving to us. And because he has done all of that for us, we can rejoice. We can rejoice when things are unreasonable. We can rejoice when the natural response would be that of an anxiety. Now think about that in your own lives. How many things in your life cause anxiety and stress? I'm pretty sure most of us could lift off at least half a dozen, if not more things than make us anxious in our very lives. And yet God says, "God is at hand. Do not be anxious."

How do I not be anxious? I don't know how these things are going to work out. I don't know how I'm going to survive. I don't know... And all these things are going on and I don't know and I get anxious. But what does your anxiety do for you? Does it solve the problem? Does being anxious help you be clear-minded about the situation? Do you come up with better answers when you're anxious? No. It destroys all rational thought. It destroys your emotions. It wraps your stomach into knots, gives you ulcers, shortens your life. Why do we do it?

Because we don't understand the grace of God and the peace that he promises is ours today. It's not peace sometime in the future when he comes again, it's peace now. It's peace and understanding that God's word is true even when I don't see it. For the Israelites, even though they're going off into exile, they still know that God promises them peace and restoration and hope. John the Baptist was in prison and he was wondering whether Christ was really the one who was sent or it was going to be someone else. So he sent his disciples to check it out and ask. And what does

Jesus do? He heals them. He heals a bunch of people, cleanses them, casts out demons. And he says, "Look what I've done. Go report that back to John. This is what was prophesied. This is what the word of God promised, and I am fulfilling his word because I am his word."

That word become flesh. So does God fulfill what he promises to fulfill? Does God give us, can he give us what he says he's going to give us? The answer is yes. We may not see it in its fullness yet. We do not see it fully revealed, but it's ours. It says, "The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds." Not it might or eventually it will. It is a now. It will. It does guard your hearts and your minds. So what do we do with our anxiety? How do we deal with our own anxiety? Or how do we deal with our unreasonableness towards others? By looking to Christ who was reasonable in all things, gentle and kind and loving, and did what we will fail to do, lived a perfect life. And then as a gift gave us salvation and life everlasting and peace and hope and security and confidence in him.

Those who are baptized by John the Baptist trusted his word because they believed that God was going to take care of them. They understood that they did not deserve it, but he still promises it. And that is where we are right now. We do not deserve the grace of God, but he gives it to us as a gift. And it is, again, not something that we are waiting for and hoping for. It is something that is ours today. That peace which surpasses all understanding is yours now. I don't understand how I can have peace in the midst of chaos, but God promises it is mine. And if I listen to his word through the power of the Holy Spirit, I receive and I experience that peace, which I don't understand. That is his promise. His word will do what he says it's going to do. If he says he's given you peace, he's given you peace. If he says do not be afraid, you don't need to be afraid. If he says do not be anxious, there is a reason. You do not need to be anxious because he is with you.

Put your trust in his word, in his promises. It is coming for you. He has claimed you as his child. He has adopted you as a member of the family of God. And as such, you are an heir of every blessing that God has for you. And you can't even count what that means. So with the peace of God in us, we then pray that it would be reflected through us, so that others might see our reasonableness, our gentleness. So that others might see our peace and not our anxiety. So that others might see our trust and our hope in the midst of a chaotic world. Because that peace surpasses all understanding. And may that peace be with you always now and forever more under life everlasting. Amen.

Amen.