

“GOD DELIGHTS IN US.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Prayer: Holy Father, you have delivered your most Holy Word into the hands of sinful men to be proclaimed to all the nations and then Jesus will come again. By the present power of your Holy Spirit speak through me as your vessel, cleanse me for your purpose. Through my weakness reveal your greatness, through my foolishness reveal your wisdom that our faith may be grounded in you alone. And as only you are able to do cause your Word to speak personally and specifically to the hearts of each hearer for their edification and for the sake of your glory. Lord, we desire to hear you and know you. Come Lord Jesus, come Holy Spirit. Amen.

Introduction.

What do we think when we hear Zephaniah 3? Or to get past the head to the heart, what do we feel when we hear Zephaniah 3?

Some of us have a bunch of walls or filters or past experiences that won't let this text get through. You are good Calvinists, you know your heart is totally depraved, too full of too much sin. God is too great and infinite and you are too small and insignificant to even be noticed by God. You are nothing special, you haven't done anything great for the kingdom. Some of you think God is mad at you or at least very disappointed.

We need to know not just that God loves us, but how much He loves us. I want us to grasp, not our love for God, but God's love for us this morning.

An illustration may help us here.

Suppose a couple, let's call them Walt and Wanda, are walking barefoot in the sand along a beach hand in hand, the waves gently crashing. Walt turns to Wanda, gazes into her deep blue eyes and says with sweet, tender affection, “Wanda, I love you, I really, really love you.”

Now what does he mean by that statement? What's he saying? Probably something like this: “Wanda, you mean the world to me. My heart beats a little faster when I think of you and I think of you all the time. I can't imagine life without you. Your great sense of humor, your beautiful eyes and hair, your smile undoes me, everything about you is wonderful. I love you.”

That seems like a fair estimate of what he might mean, right?

Certainly, he does not mean something like this: “Wanda, let’s be honest. Your breath is bad, your nose is too big, your hair is greasy and your personality leaves something to be desired. But, Wanda, despite all this, I love you.”

Is that what he means, by I love you? I think not.

So, when God says he loves us, what does he mean? Does He mean that we mean everything to Him and He can’t live without us? Does He mean that our personality, looks and smile grab His attention? Is He saying heaven would be boring without us? We must be pretty wonderful if God loves us, right?

Is it not more like the other case? God says that morally speaking we have severe bad breath, a huge nose, a terrible personality, we pretty much put the ough back in ugly. Our sins have made us completely unlovely and unlovable. (This illustration was inspired and adapted from one given by D.A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, pgs. 61-63.)

God doesn’t fall in love with us. He doesn’t say oh, isn’t she cute or beautiful, or oh, he does all the things I like or ask him to do.

He sets His affections on us, in the great mysterious counsels of His perfect and sovereign will from before the foundations of the earth, before we did or said anything.

What does God think about when He thinks about you, what does He feel in His heart? What does God feel when He looks at you? Knowing your heart, knowing your past, knowing your thoughts, what goes through God’s mind when He looks at you?

Pity, regret, sadness, disappointment, failed expectations? Does He look at us the way some people do, judging us on our looks or abilities or performance?

Some of you might say He feels love, but you are thinking that because you know in your head that God is a loving God who loves us, but it’s a kind of duty love, a kind of unfeeling love, a kind of love He is supposed to have for us sinners.

You aren’t thinking of a deep, personal, emotional kind of love, a kind of love that absolutely delights in you, that’s over the top with joy and happiness, so much that He actually enjoys us.

“Now, pastor, wait a minute. That might be true for other people, but you don’t know me, you don’t know my heart, you don’t know what I have done or said.”

You know what, I don’t need to know what you have done, I already know what God has said.

“I take great delight in you, I am supremely happy in my thoughts of you, I feel nothing but a deep affection for you, so much so that I exult over you with exuberant and loud joyful singing.”

Don't water down the language, don't down play it, don't dismiss it as not true, or at least not true for you. This is God's Word to those whose judgment and condemnation have been taken away by their trusting in the blood of Jesus. God delights in His Son and all who are in Him.

This verse has been called the John 3:16 of the OT.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

God is love. God is a joyful God. God delights in His glory and in the work of His hands. God is the happiest being in the universe.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, at the end who was the happiest, the son or the father? The father runs to his son and embraces him even though he smells like pigs. God's heart is larger than our heart, His joy will be larger than our joy. In one of His parables Jesus says, "Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21).

Let's look at the three phrases in verse 17 more closely.

He will rejoice over you with gladness.

Psalm 149:4 For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation.

Isaiah 62:5 As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

Isaiah 65:19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people.

This is divine delight.

None of you will fault me if I go off on how wonderful and beautiful our little Rose is, if I brag on her and dote over her and think she is the most wonderful granddaughter ever. Is she a sinner? Of course. Does she do disgusting things in her diaper? Yes. But that doesn't change my heart toward her.

So why do we have trouble when God absolutely delights in His children, the children born of His love shown through the saving work of Jesus?

God doesn't love like our reserved Dutch father's loved us. God love is unreserved, unrestrained, extravagant. Not minimal or in moderation, but no holding back.

In fact, the Dutch reserve we grew up with may be why some of us have trouble accepting that God loves us in this way, because we haven't experienced it in our human families. It's true our fathers influence how we view our heavenly Father. But we don't have to be chained to our earthly experiences, we can be set free by the power of the Holy Spirit opening our eyes and hearts to a far greater reality.

He will quiet you by his love.

God's love isn't just loud and external, it is also thoughtful, deep, real. As deep as it is high. There is a quiet, contented, satisfied aspect to God's love.

Sometimes God enjoys us exuberantly and sometimes quietly.

The way we might quietly enjoy our spouse of 40 years in front of an evening fire, or a mother with her baby at 2 in the morning.

He will exult over you with loud singing.

This may be the most stunning description of God's love in Scripture. Our God is a singing God. God sings His love for us.

It's only natural. Love sings. We sing about what we love. I didn't fact check this but I would be willing to wager that more songs have been written about love than any other topic. When we are happy we whistle and sing. When someone sings their heart is really in it.

There is a huge difference between speaking and singing, isn't there. If I handed you a short passage of Scripture to read in front of the congregation, you might be reluctant but I think most of you would comply. But if I handed you a short song to sing, most of you would strongly decline. I know I would. There is a big difference. God does both.

Can you believe it? God joyfully singing over you, singing about you, for you. Is this still bouncing off your mental filters and not getting through?

Do you still feel too insignificant or unimportant?

Matthew 10:29-31 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

If you want to use the insignificance argument with God, it isn't going to work. He cares for the most insignificant creatures on earth, each individual sparrow, so how much more does He care for you? He even counts the hairs on your head, literally.

3:20, "I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth.

Feel too afraid or worried or surrounded by too many problems or people who beat you down?

God knows what you are thinking.

3:17, "The Lord is a warrior who gives victory."

3:19, "Behold, at that time I will deal with your oppressors."

3:15, "He has cast out your enemies."

Does God feel too far away, too distant from you?

3:15, "The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst."

3:17, "The Lord, your God, is in your midst."

Do you still feel too guilty and not worthy, filled with too much shame?

But God knows your thoughts, He knows what you are thinking. So, He cuts you off at the pass in 3:15, "I have taken away all your judgment." There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

3:19, "I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth."

Psalm 103:10-13 He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

13 As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

How much does God love those who love Him? You can't measure it any more than you can measure the distance between the heavens and the earth.

No, this doesn't mean that our sin is no big deal or doesn't matter to God. It matters very much, it cost Him His Son. It just means that God's love is greater than our sin.

I love my sons. I delight in them. I love when they are around and I can be with them. I appreciate them. I know they aren't perfect, I know they sin, but they are my sons. And nothing they do can change that. I take pleasure in them. They are born of my heart and of my prayers.

And my love is nothing compared to God's love for His children, for those redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

We know that God expressed great delight and pleasure in His own Son, He said it out loud:

Matthew 3:17 "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

And He says the same thing about all who are in His Son, all who love His Son.

God has chosen to make us the objects of His deepest affections, simply because He delights to do so for His glory. And when you let this truth sink in it changes everything.

Implications and application.

At Jean Smit's memorial service on Friday I heard that Jean was a very accepting person and the reason for it was because she knew she was accepted by the Lord. She was a very loving person because she knew she was very loved by her Lord.

That is the fruit of knowing that our God delights in us and loves us with a perfect and great love.

When I know that in my heart of hearts then I don't have to build myself up or try to get you to accept me or like me or be impressed with me or think good thoughts about me. If I am doing those things it means I am not secure in God's love and acceptance. But if I absolutely get it that God loves me and delights in me then I won't have a need to get that love and acceptance from someplace else.

Do you feel the urge to get someone's approval, to impress others, to drop hints of how important you are or how important what you do is or how great your life is? Do you have a need to make sure others know you are better than them? Do you have a need to keep others in their place or beneath you? Why?

If the God of the universe, your creator and redeemer, loves you with an exceedingly great love, a love deeper than the oceans and higher than the heavens, then nothing else matters. You can die to all earthly things.

I pray God's exuberant delight and love for you and me would be discovered and embraced and enjoyed. Oh that we might savor His love and ponder it in our hearts and turn it over and over again in our minds. Oh that we would delight in Him because He first delighted in us. Oh that His unfathomable love for us would produce in us unassailable assurance of His goodness and favor toward us, unstoppable confidence in His purposes and plans for us, and unfettered love for friends and enemies alike.

Prayer: Holy Father in heaven, thank you that your holy and just and justified anger and wrath toward us has been completely poured out on Jesus and satisfied by His sacrifice and forgiven and covered by His blood. Thank you that all you feel toward your children now is total affection and pure, holy, steadfast, heartfelt love. Tune our hearts to hear you singing over us and quiet your anxious hearts to rest in your love.