



## Sermon, Sunday December 8, 2024

### "The Day of the Lord"

**SCRIPTURE: Zephaniah 3:11-20** <sup>11</sup> On that day you shall not be put to shame because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. <sup>12</sup> For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD— <sup>13</sup> the remnant of Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid. A Song of Joy <sup>14</sup> Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! <sup>15</sup> The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. <sup>16</sup> On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. <sup>17</sup> The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing <sup>18</sup> as on a day of festival." I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. <sup>19</sup> I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. <sup>20</sup> At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; 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.

#### Introduction: The Day of the Lord

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. Whenever we read the Old Testament, we think this is an old story. That's why we sometimes think of the Old Testament as a story that is very far from our reality. The book of Zephaniah, today's text, is one of these Bible verses.

In our hearts, 'Who is Zephaniah?' And you might be thinking, 'What does his story have to do with us?'

Zephaniah was a prophet who worked in Judea around 630 BC. At that time, Northern Israel was destroyed by the Assyrian Empire in 721 BC. In contrast, Southern Judah escaped destruction by paying tribute to Assyria, but the country's situation was a mess. Southern Judah carried out a major religious reform in 621 BC before being destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC. The king at that time was Josiah, and Zephaniah was active in the early years of King Josiah's reign.

The Book of Zephaniah declares 'The Day of the Lord.' Additionally, the Book of Zephaniah emphasizes 'the remnant' and 'social justice and humility.' Verses 12 and 13 of today's text say the following. **"For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord— the remnant of Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid."**

As this verse shows, Zephaniah's declaration that the poor and the humble will rest in peace on the Day of Lord is in line with the traditions of other Old Testament prophets. Simply put, Israel's prophets declared that the Day of Lord is not a day when the rich become more prosperous, but a day when the poor and humble are treated like human beings.



If we believe the Bible to be the word of God but accept its words unrealistically, or live a life contrary to its words, it would be unfortunate. I hope we all concentrate our hearts and think about the meaning of the Day of Lord as Zephaniah conveys it. What happens on the Day of the Lord is experienced and happens not only in ancient Israel, but also in our lives today.

### **Body: When that day comes**

In today's text, Zephaniah uses the expression "On that day" four times.

Here, on that day is the Day of the Lord. According to Zephaniah, the Day of the Lord is both a day of judgment and a day of salvation. The first part of the book of Zephaniah proclaims judgment, and the second part proclaims salvation. Zephaniah talked about what happens on this day. Verse 19 of today's text says three things about this.

**First, the Lord judges those who oppressed Israel.** At the time Zephaniah was active, Assyria, on which southern Judah depended, was losing its power, and Babylon was emerging as a powerful force. In the end, Jerusalem, the capital of Southern Judah, falls to Babylon, and the king and nobles of Southern Judah are taken captive to Babylon. In this verse, the Lord's judgment on those who oppressed Israel means that the Jews will be liberated from Babylonian captivity.

However, these words do not simply mean liberation from Babylon. This verse also includes the liberation of the poor from powerful and high-ranking people.

The Old Testament prophets viewed the world from this perspective. They thought that God was the one who would judge those who exercised oppressive power over the poor.

**Second, on the Day of the Lord, the lame will be healed.** The fact that the people of Southern Judah became captives of Babylon meant that they became crippled. On the Day of Lord, God heals people and nations with disabilities. On the Day of Lord, liberation from mental and physical obstacles occurs in the Lord.

**Third, on the Day of Lord, the Lord searches for and gathers those who are lost.** The life of the people of Southern Judah as captives in Babylon means that they have lost their way. I once had a hard experience where I lost track of the trail while hiking and ended up wandering down the mountain along the valley.

There is nothing as gloomy as when we lose the purpose and meaning of living. On the Day of the Lord, God seeks out and gathers those who are lost and who have lost the meaning of life.

As verse 19 of today's text says, the Lord judges the powerful who oppresses the powerless, heals the lame, and finds the lost and gathers them into the safe embrace of the Lord.

There are many people around us who are living in the situation described in verse 19 of today's text. On the Day of the Lord, those who are in this situation will experience liberation. It means salvation in our lives.

However, some may complain about Zephaniah's proclamation of the Day of the Lord. These people may think that it is not fair for the oppressed to always do well.

We can also see the complaints of these people in the story of "**the owner of the vineyard**" in the Gospel. According to the parable of the vineyard owner, when the vineyard owner paid the same wage to someone who worked all day from the morning and to someone who came late and worked an hour, the person who worked all day complained. However, the vineyard owner dismisses these complaints.

This parable does not claim that it is okay to be lazy. In this parable, the person who only worked for one hour could not work, not because he did not want to work, but because there was no one to hire him as a laborer.

Everyone in the world, without exception, needs daily bread. In other words, no matter how little someone works, they need money to eat three meals a day. The parable of the vineyard owner places more importance on



the humane life of the workers than on the quality and quantity of labor. The vineyard owner's actions may bring complaints to some people, but on the contrary, they may bring grace to others.

Which side do you and I belong to? I ask you: Are God's will and actions to allow everyone to live like human beings a grace to us? Or is it an act of God who needs to hear our complaints?

Jesus' parable of the vineyard owner in the Gospel and the things that will happen on the Day of the Lord in today's text from Zephaniah are trying to tell us the same thing. This is the hope for the day of liberation and salvation when all people in the world can live like human beings.

But is this world feasible? We often experience that many people's efforts to create a better world fail or are not fully accomplished. However, the Bible, God's revealed word, promises that God will perfect such a world. That day is the 'Day of the Lord' that today's text speaks of.

### **Conclusion: Our responsibility and waiting**

Today we celebrate the second Sunday of Advent. The second coming of Jesus is when the events that must occur on the Day of the Lord are completed. God, the owner of history, judges those who oppress people, heals the lame, and finds and gathers those who have lost their way. We cannot live in this difficult world without this promise of hope from the Lord.

I ask you as I conclude today's message: **'If the salvation and liberation of the world is entirely the Lord's responsibility, should we just do nothing and wait for that day to come?'**

I have two answers to this question. A cold winter has arrived in Iowa, where we live. There is little we can do to make sure the cold winter passes, and a warm spring comes. From this perspective, we can only wait for the Day of the Lord of salvation and liberation.

However, if people start a nuclear war and destroy the Earth, or if the environment is destroyed due to excessive use of energy, the spring we expected may not come. So, we must wait for the Day of the Lord of liberation and salvation, but on the other hand, we must fulfill the responsibility given to us so as not to destroy the lives of individuals and society. The specific methods we must take to achieve this may be different for each of us.

What is clear is that, as Prophet Zephaniah hopes today, we must create a system in which the powerful no longer oppress the powerless. Additionally, we must act in a way that does not cause impairment to people's minds and bodies. Furthermore, we must be able to cooperate with people around us so that they do not lose their way in life. And we must wait for the Day of the Lord, which will be revealed clearly before us. I hope we all have a fruitful Advent season through this participation in life, hope, and waiting. **Amen.**

