

**Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! 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. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.**

**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."**

Be Glad and Rejoice!

- I. God has taken away your punishment
- II. God is with you
- III. God is mighty to save

Dear Advent Worshiper,

A lot of ink is being spilled to rid this current season of the year of the word, "Christmas." There are those who don't want the word Christmas to be spoken, or sung, or printed, or even pictured in advertisement. Because there is a concentration of people in high places who are promoting this issue, it seems that progress in being made to accomplish the goal of referring only to the "holiday" time of the year. Will the proponents succeed? It is conceivable that laws could be enacted that will make a reference to Christ or Christmas a violation of federal law. It would not be the first time it happened.

While this is an issue to which you will want to speak when you have the opportunity, it is important to ask yourself this question. Do you believe that legislation can take Christ out of the hearts of the believers? Do you personally think that someone can erase your faith in Jesus Christ by passing a law? Do you remember what happened in the days of the Apostles? There was open persecution of the Christians by the unbelieving Jews and by the pagan government, the Roman Empire. Was the Christian Church snuffed out as a result of that hostility? No, it was not. As a matter of fact, the Church grew and spread during those painful times.

The same was true in more recent times. In Russia Christians were put to death for their confession of Christ. They were exiled to Siberia to work as slaves. The leaders of the Orthodox Church compromised their confessional stand and allowed themselves to be used by the atheistic government to promote the ideologies of the god-less rulers. Do you think all this persecution snuffed out the faith in the hearts of the Russian people? No, it did not. When the wall came down many believers surfaced and began to worship openly again.

I could well imagine that in the early days of Zephaniah's ministry, it was not popular to speak of Jehovah and the promises that He had made to their forefathers – to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Paganism had prevailed under King Manasseh, King Josiah's father. The pagans were running the state. The pagans were working with a fever to put down the worship of Jehovah. The temple has been abandoned and left in ruins.

However, when King Josiah, the boy king, became 18 years old, he began to exert his authority to clean out paganism from the land. The pagan images were removed and their places of worship were destroyed. Zephaniah, a prophet at that time, was a strong proponent of this reform. The key theme of his book of prophecy was, "**BE SILENT BEFORE THE SOVEREIGN LORD, FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD IS NEAR.**" The prophet spoke of the

“Day of the Lord” in two ways. The first was a reference to God’s judgment against individuals and rebellious nations. The second reference was to God’s judgment day at the end of the world.

This morning we want to pursue the reasons Zephaniah gives for us who believe in God to BE GLAD AND REJOICE. The first reason is that God has taken away our sins. The prophet writes, ***Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy.*** If the enemies of freedom and peace would be defeated in the Iraq and Pakistan and Afghanistan, there would be singing and dancing not only in the streets of those countries, but in most places in the world. Our men and women in the armed services would be home. Their families would be rejoicing right along with them. Peace and freedom would be reason enough to celebrate.

The reason Zephaniah gives for being glad and rejoicing is not because of political peace and freedom. It is this. ***The LORD has taken away your punishment, He has turned back your enemy.*** What is the punishment referred to here? It is the punishment for sins committed. The people of Israel had been living like a spiritual harlot. They had given themselves to pagan worship and all the spiritually scandalous activities that went along with it. They had abandoned the keeping of the Sabbath. They had stopped bringing their sacrifices to the temple. They had allowed the temple to be reduced to ruin. What could be seen in the outward conduct of the people was just the tip of the spiritual decay that was festering in the hearts and souls of the people.

Now while a person is living such a life of self-indulgence and selfish excesses, he or she may not be much aware of the consequences to come. The person speeding down the mountainous road in drunken hilarity with his friends, ignoring the signs along the road under the delusion that he is the captain of his soul and the master of his fate only comes to realize too late the foolishness of his excesses when he can’t make the turn and is headed into the abyss below.

We need to take seriously the Word of God that calls us to watch for the signs of the LORD’S return. We need to listen when the Forerunner of the Christ calls out to us to repent because the kingdom of God is near. We need to listen to the urgency in the voice of God when He directs us to call on Him in the day of trouble and thank and praise Him for mercy.

When we see our lost condition because of our sins, we will appreciate the fact that the LORD has taken away our punishment. He has turned back our enemy, who is the devil. Satan can no longer do with us as he chooses. He is vanquished. The One (Christ) stronger than he (the devil) has come! Christ is now enthroned in our hearts and we are glad and rejoice.

A second reason the prophet sets forth for our gladness and rejoicing is that God is with us. Listen - ***The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you,*** Do you think that Jesus was afraid when the mob came to take Him captive in the Garden? Do you think that He was afraid when He was arraigned before Caiaphas? Do you sense that He was trembling in His boots when He was brought before Pontius Pilate or King Herod? Why not? Because He is the LORD God Almighty. There was no enemy that could do to Him what they wanted to do. Not even death could conquer Him.

This same LORD God Almighty lives in you. This LORD God Almighty who rules the universe is your constant companion. In addition to this, He has at His disposal the whole host of the holy angels. When Peter was in prison, God sent one of His angels to free him. Jesus said that the angels carried Lazarus to his place in glory. He has promised that His holy angels will guard and keep you in all your ways. They can do this because they are messengers of the Almighty.

Make it practical. Has it ever happened that you have been driving and dosing, when you should have pulled over? Yet you missed piling it up somewhere because your angel helped you stay out of trouble. How many times haven't you wiped your brow and said to yourself, "That was a close call?" As a matter of fact, many times we don't even realize how close we have been to disaster because God and His angels are with us.

There is one event that we will all face when it will be critically important for us that our Lord Christ is with us. I am referring to the Last Day. Satan will writhe and rant that we should not be acquitted of our sins. He will blow smoke and spit fire and the demons of hell will scream, but the one who bound him with the Truth of His Word is also the one who will pitch him into the burning lake of fire. Our Jesus is mighty to save us. This is what the prophet says, ***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.*** Taking care of you in the judgment is not a ho-hum job for Jesus. It is something He delights in doing. He wants to do it. He came in the flesh to do this for you. It is His delight to hold you in His loving arms and to keep you as His own. He can testify to the fact that you have been cleansed of all your sins because He is the one who had done this cleansing for you.

Can you imagine the sound of the voice of Jesus that is described as ever rolling waters, soothing and resonating, singing as He rejoices over you? For the person who has rejected Jesus as Lord and Savior, the Last Day will be a horrible experience. With the finger of the Judge pointing to the darkness and the voice of God saying "depart from Me". It can't get any worse than that.

But for you dear people of God, who have been recipients of God's gift of faith in Jesus, this will be a most glorious day. All the promises of God will come together in that face to face meeting with your Jesus. With His hand stretched out to receive you, He will say, "Come!" The choirs of angels will be singing their welcome song and you will be led with Him into the banquet of salvation.

Be glad and rejoice. Everything is prepared. Amen



