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THOUGHT
FOR
CHRISTIAN
LIVING

Today's Quick Word Zephaniah 3:17

By Bruce Christian

ZEPHANIAH 3:17 - *"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."*

The prophet Zephaniah was the LORD's mouthpiece to pronounce Judgement on the nations of the world, including his own Chosen People, Judah, probably in the decade preceding Josiah's reforms in 621 BC. He warned of the coming of the great 'Day of the LORD' when God will punish people for their idolatry, their pride and arrogance, their injustice, their wickedness and cruelty. It is all hard-hitting truth, and it therefore did not endear him to the people, as was the case with all the faithful prophets!

It was the sobering truth of Divine Wrath and Judgement, reflecting God's holy character, that makes Zephaniah's closing message of salvation more poignant. God's love, compassion and mercy, that cause him to take 'great delight' in us and to 'rejoice over us with singing', and that cause us to experience his quietness and peace, can only be properly understood and appreciated against the backdrop of his wrath against sin.

So, who are the recipients of this grace? They are the "meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD" (12). And on what basis can the LORD make this promise? As the prophet says, "the LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy" (15), and WE have the additional information that it was the Lord Jesus Christ who achieved this for us through the CROSS ("Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by BECOMING A CURSE FOR US, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" - Galatians 3:13) and the EMPTY TOMB ("The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ... 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." - 1 Corinthians 15:26, 55-57).

Is the main reason we are failing to impact our own society with the 'tidings of comfort and joy' the fact that we are firstly failing to warn it, with a sense of urgency, about God's coming Judgement?

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Today's Quick Word Acts 19:8-10

By Bruce Christian

ACTS 19:8-10 - *Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.*

The Apostle Paul was a Jew, 'a Hebrew of the Hebrews' (Philippians 3:5), and his deep love and concern for the salvation of his people was evident in all his actions and writings (cf Romans 9:1-5; 10:1-4). Throughout his missionary journeys his starting point for evangelism was always the Synagogue, and this continued in spite of the strong opposition he faced whenever he did so. Here, in Ephesus, it was no exception. Paul KNEW that the Jesus he trusted in and preached WAS/IS the Promised Messiah that his people had been waiting for for so long, and that salvation could NOT be found apart from HIM, but he also would not have been surprised by the fierceness of the opposition he received from the Jews; after all, he himself, as a devout Pharisee, had been engaged in a concentrated

effort to prevent Christians from spreading their 'dangerous', 'destructive' message when he met the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus! I serve on the Council of International Mission to Jewish People (IMJP, formerly CWI), and am acutely aware that the barrier to Jewish evangelism still exists, even though the need for it is no less urgent. But, from our historical perspective (given the failure of the Church to speak out with a clear voice against what was happening in Germany in the lead up to, and during, the Holocaust) we have a lot of hard work (and praying) to do, with contrite and repentant hearts, before we can share meaningfully with them the Good News of God's saving grace in JESUS ALONE. And let us learn from the Apostle's patience and persistence to persevere in this difficult task. Paul's heart was changed miraculously by the Holy Spirit on the way to Damascus, and this same Holy Spirit can soften people's hearts today. It is great to hear how effectively this is happening through the witness of IMJP workers (Mark & Rahel Landrum - who come from Jewish Holocaust-surviving families!). Please join me in regular prayer that their work will see many more Jewish people coming to saving faith in Jesus ('Yeshua') as their Promised Messiah before he returns as Judge.

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Today's Quick Word Genesis 21:8-10

By Bruce Christian

GENESIS 21:8-10 - *The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."*

'God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. ... His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his work in vain; God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.' (William Cowper).

The intense and life-threatening internal struggles Cowper had throughout in his own life are expressed well in this well-known hymn, and I think many of us can identify easily with him!

The dynamics of the account of the LORD's involvement in the births of Ishmael and Isaac is a good example in Scripture of how we should view God's often very strange Providence. As I read through this chapter of Genesis I find myself asking questions like: 'Why did the Sovereign LORD not arrange for Isaac to be conceived earlier so that there didn't need to even BE an Ishmael in the equation?'; and "Why couldn't Ishmael

and Hagar have maintained a more congenial relationship with Isaac and Sarah?"

Moses doesn't really help us to find answers to these questions; we have to wait 2,000 years for the Apostle Paul to explain it all to us in Galatians 4:19-31! Ishmael was the result of Abraham taking things into his own hands, trying to 'help' the LORD to fulfil his promises by his own efforts - a sort of 'works-oriented' approach to relating to the Creator of the Universe. Paul wants the Galatian churches to face up to the fact that this can NEVER work because the Creator of the Universe is a God of GRACE, who fulfils his own promises by Himself, according to HIS OWN TIMING, and all he requires of us is to TRUST his promises and WAIT, as Abraham discovered when Sarah became pregnant with Isaac!

As was the case with Ishmael and Isaac, a works-oriented approach to God will always be in direct conflict with (and will therefore undermine and negate) a grace-faith-trust approach, robbing us of the blessing and peace God promises to all who come to Jesus with the only thing we have to offer him - 'a broken and a contrite heart' (Psalm 51:14-17).