

The Savior's Sermon 1) Trust with Humility

Zephaniah 2:3, 3:11-13 • 2023-01-29 • Epiphany Series: "Savior's Sermon"



There is a bird in Alaska that has an interesting life cycle. The auklet lives along the coast of Alaska along a string of islands with burning and erupting volcanoes, the Aleutian Islands. Over a dozen large volcanoes and many smaller volcanoes form the islands. On Average one of these volcanoes erupts every six months. When the lava flows it destroys all the plant and animal life in its path. A grassy island can suddenly become rock and ash.

But it turns out that the auklet loves the destruction of the volcanoes. When all other life is wiped out and the rocky crevices form, the auklets move into the rocky, empty islands. It serves as a perfect place to live without any enemies. They can lie down and nest securely. And soon after they inhabit an empty volcanic island, their presence fosters new plant life, and the island transforms. When all other life dies and disappears, the lowly auklet shows up. After sheltering from the eruption on another island it returns to the barren volcanic rocks. It thrives after the destruction is over. It is really interesting to see the barren landscape of an island that has been wiped out of all life come back to life because of this lowly bird.

It may not come from a volcanic eruption, but the Scriptures talk about a time when all life on earth will be wiped out. It won't be another great flood. Prophets like Zephaniah foretold that God would wipe out all life on the earth and all people with fire and great destruction. The prophet Zephaniah calls it, "the Day of the Lord's Anger." And we can be sure it will be far more terrifying and more encompassing than a volcanic eruption.

But God still has a plan to preserve and restore life. Who will survive and thrive after all else is destroyed? Today we will begin a three-part series looking at Old Testament reflections of Jesus' sermon on the mount. And we will see from the prophet Zephaniah God's plan for what happens after the "Day of the Lord's Anger." We will see exactly who will find a new home after the destruction of this world. It's not the auklet; but it is the lowly.

Zephaniah lived when the destruction of Jerusalem lingered. Josiah was king in Jerusalem. He was a godly king and tore down idols. But his efforts were too little too late. Josiah couldn't fully stem the tide of evil in Jerusalem. In a few years they would experience the eruption of God's just anger and justice. They were just one generation away from the Babylonians' sudden rise to the top and Jerusalem's fall to the bottom. God's anger was coming soon!

But there was still hope for those who wanted to survive that day! In light of the coming judgment, Zephaniah called out, *"Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger."*

We remain on the verge of the day of the Lord's anger. Like islanders living near an active volcano, everyone in this world must consider that our time will come to an end. Zephaniah's warning about God's judgment was partially fulfilled when Jerusalem fell at the hands of its enemies. But Zephaniah spoke about something for you. He warned that God would destroy far more than Jerusalem. He said that God will destroy this world and all who live in it. God's anger will come on every sin and every sinner. That is why Zephaniah's plea to "seek the Lord" is still so important for us today. Everyone ought to be seeking to have shelter "on the day of the Lord's anger."

So, why doesn't everyone listen to Zephaniah's plea? Shouldn't everyone be looking for shelter from the day of the Lord's anger? God has preserved the message of Zephaniah for all to read to this day. God's Word still calls out to a world in great danger of fire and destruction. We still hear the Word of God pleading to a dying world, "seek the Lord."

But many do not want to listen to this cry because he calls on all to "seek humility." Humility is not a natural trait. And it certainly isn't something that we want when things are going well for us. Can you picture the rich and the strong in Zephaniah's day believing they would never fall to their enemies? They had their skills in making weapons. They had their precious metals and stones mined from the earth. They had their strong fortifications. Life was good and they were on top of the world. No one would humble them, they thought. But then God did humble them!

Still today humility is not sought. Many think the strong will inherit the earth. Wars are fought and won over who is the strongest. People attain bigger and better things based on who is the wealthiest. Positions of power are given to the most influential and powerful. Meanwhile, it seems that humility will get you nowhere.

Do you seek humility? When you are on top of the world it can be easy to think you can look down on God and on his Word. The man who is healthy and strong can easily think he has the right to push his weight around. The man who is wealthy and powerful can easily believe he has the right to look down on everyone else -even his God. The woman who has everyone's attention soon feels no need to pay attention to the Word of God. When we have our best times and our best days, are we really at our best? Or is that not most often when we realize the worst in ourselves?

When you are on top of the world, you can fail to realize how far you can fall. God will put to shame every proud person and all who look down on the humble. He will clear the slate of this world from them all! He will cast them in his anger away from this world and into the pits of hell.

But not all will be gone. In the sermon on the mount Jesus said, *"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."* God has a plan for the proud. But he also has a plan for the lowly.

The Lord says, *"On that day you, Jerusalem, will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from you your arrogant boasters. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill."* God would take the proud in Jerusalem and they would be taken by their enemies. The rich would have their land taken. The skilled workers would be carried off to Babylon, and all the upper class would either be killed or enslaved. But that was only a picture of what God would do on the last day. He will take all the powerful and wealthy who boast in this world and make them an object of shame. And in his Church, he will remove all those who are proud and love their own way. Never again will anyone be insolent or haughty.

Like the auklet rising up after the volcano's fire, those who trust in the Lord will survive the destruction and fire. They will live without fear of enemies or danger. This is what the humble who seek the Lord and trust in his name are promised: *"I will leave within you the meek and humble. The remnant of Israel will trust in the name of the Lord."*

When Jerusalem was destroyed after Zephaniah's time there were still the poor and lowly left in the land. Seventy years later God also allowed a remnant to return from exile in Babylon. The city was not completely overturned. Men like Zerubbabel the prince of Judah and Joshua the high priest rebuilt the temple. Later others like Ezra and Nehemiah returned and rebuilt the city walls and further restored the temple. Those who were spiritually restored sought the Lord.

But that restoration was just a small foreshadow of what Zephaniah foretold. God said he would completely remove all wrong, all deceit, and all trouble. When Jesus came and preached the sermon on the mount, the people were still waiting for Zephaniah's prophecy to come to fulfillment. Jesus told his disciples, *"Blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek...blessed are you!"* He was reflecting the Word spoken through Zephaniah. The humble are blessed.

It didn't start with what they had. It started with what was removed from them. The only way that anyone can have and to enjoy God's blessing is to have evil removed. God did this for all believers, for Jerusalem. His Church would not be spared because it was holy enough to be spared. Instead, it would be spared because God would purify his people. *"On that day you, Jerusalem, will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me."* God's people are guilty of wrong. They have shamefully done wrongs against their Lord. But God promises that he will not put them to shame for their wrongs. Instead, he will remove all evil. He removes their sin, and he removes their enemies from power.

Jesus did this as he took on the curse for sin. On the cross he carried all our wrongs and all our arrogant boasting. He became the lowliest and humbled himself so that God would not have to humble us. He calls on us to seek the Lord and to seek humility. We find both in his Son. Jesus was the lowliest man who ever lived. In humility he took the lowest position as the servant of all. He had no home, no wealth, no position of power. Even though he came from the highest throne as the Son of God, he set it all aside. He became so lowly that he gave his life.

Yet he did not remain lowly. He rose to life and was lifted up to the highest position. He now rules over all the world and all creation. His position went from the lowliest to the highest. And he promises those who in humility seek him will also be lifted up. In him we find shelter and refuge. Our risen and living Jesus will come in glory and after this world has perished, we will inherit the gift of eternal life.

We will find shelter in a new place. It will be everlasting and perfectly secure. When Jesus says, *"The meek will inherit the earth,"* he doesn't mean they will inherit a broken or shattered world. He means they will inherit a world like the one described by Zephaniah. Zechariah foretold peace for all who humbly trust in the Lord, *"They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid."* After this world is destroyed, there will be no more sin, no more evil, no more destructive pride and boasting. It will be such a great peace that we will never fear any enemies. In the same way that an auklet on a brand-new island knew it was free from rodents or other pests, the new creation will be free from anything that could harm us. The devil with his arrogant pride and all evil will be shut out from the kingdom. And those who trust in the Lord will live in his shelter forever! We will be like cattle grazing freely on the open fields without a care or worry. We will be feasting securely in God's eternal kingdom.

The Christian lives an interesting life. It goes against the way of this world. They don't grasp after power and wealth to get ahead. They don't seek to be the highest. They don't assert themselves in boastful pride. Instead, they seek the lowest position. They place themselves humbly under their God. They acknowledge all the wrongs they have done. But they trust that the Lord will do just as he promised. He will purify them, remove their sins, and remove all evil. He will make everything new. And the Savior's sermon, reflected in the Old Testament, will stand for all time. The meek will inherit the earth. Trust with humility.