

# Rev. Donald Morrison - God delights in His people

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[ 0 : 00 ] So we turn again for a while to the passage of Scripture we read in the Old Testament prophecy of Zephaniah. And in verse 16, The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save.

He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love. He will exult over you with loud singing. The world, as we know, is full of religion.

As a matter where you go in the world, you will find religion, belief, philosophies of one kind or another. There is not a nation in the world where there is not some form of religious belief.

As people want to find out where we came from. As people want some kind of guidance on the journey through life. In April, in India, many millions of Hindu believers gather at the river Ganges. Where they believe that by immersing themselves in the river, their sins will be washed away. They even imagine that the river Ganges itself is a holy river.

[ 1 : 42 ] And they believe that by immersing themselves in the flowing waters of that river, then they will be made, they will be cleansed.

And then we could look at Islam, for instance, and devout Muslims, of which there are many in this country today. They keep Ramadan, whereby they fast from sunrise to sunset.

And pilgrims to Mecca, they go on the annual Hajj, as they call it. And they wear white robes when they're in Mecca in order to signify purity and forgiveness for their sins.

If you see a picture of Mecca, you've got in the middle of this huge area, this great big black building. And it contains within it a meteorite that fell from the sky.

Where else would it fall from? Many, many hundreds, if not thousands of years ago. And it was venerated by the pre-Muslim Arabs, the pagan Arabs.

[ 2 : 44 ] It was a holy spot for them long before Islam came on the scene. And if you go to Mecca, and I hope none of us will end up in Mecca, you see the pilgrim is going seven times clockwise around this stone, which is hidden in a kind of a building.

And then they'll go seven times anticlockwise or counterclockwise in the other direction. But if we go to Revelation chapter 7 in John's great vision that the Lord gave John, where he transported him, as it were, into the very end of time, we find there that the pilgrims, those who were in the very presence of God, were also wearing white robes.

And those white robes for them signified purity, signified that their sins had been forgiven. But their sins had not been forgiven by engaging in some kind of religious ritual, but by being washed in the blood of the Lamb.

And without such blood-washed robes, it would be impossible to enter into heaven. You know, even if we had one sin, if all our sins had been forgiven, even if we had one sin, that one sin would prevent us from entering into heaven, because we would be subject to God's wrath.

But the good news of the gospel is that God's wrath was poured out on His Son, because He bore upon Himself all of our sins, our numberless sins.

[ 4 : 26 ] And at the end of the day, all the religion in the world, all the ritual in the world will not cleanse us of our sins and gain entry into heaven, but knowing and trusting the Lord Jesus Christ will.

That is the only way we can ever enter heaven. I am the way and the truth and the life, says the Lord Jesus Christ. No one comes to the Father except through me.

And I often say that as Christian believers, we have something far, far better than mere religion. We have a relationship. We have a relationship with God.

We know God as our Father in heaven. We are the recipients of His amazing love. It's a relationship that has been established by God in the first place.

It's jealously guarded by God, and it's brought to fulfillment by God Himself. In John 17, Jesus says, This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

[ 5 : 39 ] Do we all know the Lord Jesus Christ? Are we convinced this evening, on this Lord's Day, that Christ is our Savior, that when He went to the cross at Calvary, He died in my place, and therefore I have no need to fear that I will not enter into heaven.

And this particular verse that we're looking at briefly this evening is a verse that speaks of that relationship, because the chapter emphasizes the fact that it is God Himself who has established it. The Lord your God is in your midst. He didn't just happen to be in our midst, but He came and He placed Himself in the midst of His people, a mighty one who will save.

He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by His love. He will exult over you with loud singing.

And again, in the first person, I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival. So we see here, this is a God at work. He will do this, and He will do that.

[ 6 : 50 ] Repeated throughout the chapter, reminding us of who we are and what we are, and reminding us that all that we have in Christ is because of God's amazing grace.

It is by grace you have been saved. We read in Ephesians chapter 2, through faith, and it's not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by work, so that no one can boast.

And the God of the covenant, the God who has entered into a covenantal relationship with His people, is a God who is totally committed to His people.

And this verse records three things concerning the commitment that God has towards His believing people. But before we focus in on verse 16 and 17, I want us just to take a brief look at the background.

Zephaniah, we know very little about Zephaniah. He's one of what is known as the minor prophets, not minor because his message was somehow minor in comparison to the major prophets of Isaiah and Ezekiel, for instance, and Jeremiah, but simply minor in that there are so few chapters compared to Isaiah, for instance.

[ 8 : 09 ] Zephaniah, he prophesied during the reign of King Josiah from 640 to 609 BC. And you'll find that Josiah was a godly king.

He was a godly king who purged the land of everything that was contrary to God's law. We might say, well, where is Josiah today in the United Kingdom?

The temple had suffered neglect, and so he provided the funds to have the temple restored. He renewed the covenant because people had been ignoring God and going about their daily lives without any reference to the God who had taken them from Egypt and who had established them in the land of promise.

And in 2 Chronicles, he renewed the covenant to follow the Lord and keep his commands, regulations, and decrees with all his heart and soul and to obey the words of the covenant written in the book.

I remember following the general election a couple of years ago, I think it was, and I was watching on television all the new intake of MPs down in Westminster, and they were all having to come forward, forward and before the Speaker of the House.

[ 9 : 33 ] They had to pledge allegiance to this country, to our sovereign. And some of them were making that pledge with their hand on the Bible.

Others were making that pledge with their hand on the Koran. And others who didn't believe in any God at all were simply pledging that they would serve the country to the best of their ability.

But wouldn't it be wonderful if we were to look on and find that our MPs and our MSPs were pledging themselves just as Josiah pledged himself on behalf of the nation to follow the Lord, to keep his commands, regulations, and decrees with all his heart and soul and to obey the words of the covenant written in the book.

Alas, that's not quite the way things are in the United Kingdom of today. But we have something that is powerful and we have prayer and we are called in the Bible to uphold those who are over us, kings and rulers of one kind or another.

And when we go back, and I don't want to focus on it, but when we go back to the earlier chapters of this particular prophecy, it speaks of terrible judgments.

[10:55] Firstly, against Judah because the people of Judah were unfaithful to the Lord. He had given them every blessing. He had lavished his grace upon them and yet they turned away from the Lord.

They turned away from him, the source of living water. And then we find that God's judgments were being poured out upon the entire world, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Cushites, and Assyria, judgment against godless nations.

And then finally, it concludes with good news, good news for the Lord's people, the faithful remnant as it's described here. My worshippers, we read in verse 10, from beyond the rivers of Cush, that's Egypt, my worshippers, the daughter of my dispersed, ones will bring my offering.

And they would have cause to be glad and rejoice with all their heart, as we read here in verse 14. Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion, shout, O Israel, rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

The Lord has taken away the judgments against you. He has cleared away your enemies. And it looks back to a time when the Lord had judged his people, he had sent them into exile.

[12:18] He had given a promise through Jeremiah that after 70 years, he would bring them back and reestablish them in the land of Judah. Because in God's great plan of salvation for the people of this world, it was necessary for the Lord's people to be brought back and reestablished in the land of Judah because it would be from the Lord Jesus Christ that would come salvation for all the nations of the world, not just for those in Judah and in Israel.

And verse 15 here, the Lord has taken away the judgments against you. It speaks of the exile coming to an end. It speaks of Judah's enemies being turned back.

But surely it also looks beyond that immediate event to our punishment being taken away by the death of Christ on the cross at Calvary and our enemy, the devil, being defeated.

And so there's three points I want us to make this evening from this particular passage of scripture.

It says, On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear not, O Zion, let not your hands grow weak.

The Lord your God is in your presence. The Lord your God is in your midst. And so that's the first point, the presence of the Lord, the presence of the Lord with his people.

[13:52] Centuries before the time of Zephaniah, the Lord had promised Joshua that just as he had been with Moses, the leader of the Lord's people before him, so he would also be with Joshua.

And it must have been a very difficult time for Joshua. He had been number two to Moses. He had lived in the shadow of Moses.

He'd never really had to make any great decisions himself on behalf of the Lord's people. And now Moses had been taken away and the mantle of leadership had been thrust onto the shoulders of Joshua.

And so the Lord came and encouraged him. And we see in chapter one of the book of Joshua, do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Not just in some places, I'll be with you here and I'll be with you there, but not necessarily in the middle, but I will be with you wherever you go. And that same promise is repeated here in the first part of verse 15.

[15:03] The Lord has taken away the judgments against you. He has cleared away your enemies, the King of Israel. The Lord is in your midst. You shall never again fear evil.

The Lord your God is in your midst. He's right there in the heart of his people. He's not out on the edge looking in. He's right there. In the very heart of his people.

And just as God promised to be with Joshua all those thousands of years ago, so he promises to be with all of his people. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you.

Not being with us on the odd occasion when he comes by to see how we're getting on, but he's with us always. He's constantly with us on every single occasion.

And that should be a great encouragement for us when we're feeling weak or inadequate for the tasks that the Lord has given us to do. It's a great comfort to us when we feel lonely as we often can do, when we feel misunderstood, when we feel forsaken or abandoned by those around us.

[16:13] And often, for many, many Christians, that is the reality of going against the flow, of walking the narrow path, of rejecting the broad avenue down which the majority of people walk.

I will never leave you nor forsake you. There's a finality in those words. I will never forsake you. And that's a promise of the Lord.

Moses himself, when he finally confronted a Pharaoh. And he must have felt inadequate for the task. This man who had been shepherding sheep out in the wastes of Midian for 40 years. And now here he was confronting one of the most powerful men in the world. And he must have felt inadequate. And who would not? But the Lord encouraged him in Exodus chapter 3, I will be with you.

He wasn't just being sent out by himself, a lonely figure accompanied by his brother Aaron. But the Lord, the invisible presence of the Lord, was there with him.

[ 17 : 22 ] And the great task of the Church, the Great Commission, is to be faithful to that commission. And it's a daunting task, as I'm sure we all know, to speak about Jesus.

Not everyone wants to hear about Jesus. People who are normally friendly might become quite hostile towards us. It might become quite agitated.

It might become quite abusive. I don't want to hear about your Jesus. But we're not sent off by ourselves. We're not abandoned to some lonely post far away without any resources to help us. At the end of chapter 28, surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Jesus is with us always, on every occasion.

And there lies our confidence. There lies our strength. The fact that we live and serve in the presence of the Lord. That means that he will guide us. It means that he will open doors for us.

[ 18 : 25 ] He will close other doors. He will go before us and break up the stony ground. He will clear away the obstacles. And in Psalm 73, yet I am always with you.

You hold me by my right hand. You hold me by my right hand. I remember years ago speaking to a woman and she had been asked to do a specific task in the hospital where she was a nurse and she didn't want to do it.

And so the matron said, will you go off to the cupboard and get a shroud and I'll do it. And so she went to the cupboard where the shrouds were stored and she asked the Lord to help her in her situation.

And she told me that she saw a vision of a hand and it wasn't just a hand per se. It was a left hand. And I often wondered what was the significance of the left hand.

And then many years ago I had the privilege of conducting that lady's funeral and I was looking up Psalm 73, yet I am with you always.

[ 19 : 39 ] You hold me by my right hand. And if you imagine a God as a figure, as a human being, if he's holding me by my right hand, then he's putting out his left hand.

And she took that to be the assurance that God was given her on that particular occasion. So that's the first point is the presence of the Lord with his people.

And then the second point is God's power, a mighty one who will save, a mighty one who will save. But for God's amazing grace we would not know anything about the people of Israel they would be numbered amongst the Hittites and all the other ites that have been lost in the sands of time over the centuries in the Middle East.

A people who briefly flourished, a people who were conquered and a people who were eventually lost in a foreign land. They were a subject people. They were held captive by a cruel and ruthless military power.

[ 20 : 46 ] And the prospect of national restoration must have seemed impossible to them. Salvation was beyond their grasp. But as Jesus reminds us in Matthew 19, with God, all things are possible.

And God brought down their captives. God liberated the captives and he brought them back home. And we sing about that in some of the Psalms. In Isaiah 40, see the sovereign Lord comes with power and his arm rules for him.

And then in that lovely Psalm 126, when Zion's bondage, God turned back as men who dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

Among the heathens said, the Lord great things for them has wrought. The Lord has done great things for us whence joy to us is brought. God exercised his power, his mighty power.

He released his people from captivity. He brought them back over the long, long journey to their homeland. And why did he do it?

[ 21 : 57 ] Because they were his people. They were his covenant people. They were a people to whom he had committed himself long, long before to a loving and to an everlasting relationship.

He saved them because of his love for them and because he desired to bless them. He saved them because his great desire was to bless you and I also because amongst the people who returned

from captivity were the ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ.

and from him would come the savior of the world. God's great plan to save people from every nation meant that his captive people had to come back.

They had to come back to Judah because the lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world had to be nailed to a cross in Judah outside the city walls of Jerusalem.

And it would be a descendant of David who by his death on the cross would break the power of sin and of death. So God's power unleashed for the benefit of his people.

[ 23 : 09 ] He saves them. He sustains them. He protects them. He brings them safely through the storms of life and at the end of life's passage he will bring us safely into a safe haven on the far shore.

some people tell you that they are too sinful in order to be saved too bad to be forgiven but remember again with God all things are possible.

If God parted the Red Sea if he parted the River Jordan can he not even save the most hardened of sinners? And the answer is yes of course he can.

Paul writes I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes God's word the gospel it's not just words written on paper as in any other book it's God's power being unleashed as we read it and as we proclaim it.

Have you experienced God's power in your life? Have you experienced God reaching down into that fearful pit and lifting your feet? out of the miry clay and establishing you and the rock that is Christ.

[ 24 : 26 ] And then when a sinner does come eventually to salvation can God's power keep them from being taken back by the devil? Is he able to gain a victory and snatch the Lord's people back?

Of course God's power will keep them safe because we are held fast in the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ which is the same as the hand of the Father the safest place where we can ever be as Christians.

I give them eternal life says Jesus and they shall never perish no one can snatch them out of my hand. Jesus is the author of his people's faith and he's also the finisher the perfecter of that faith the work he began he will bring it to its ultimate conclusion so God is not only with us as a companion as an encourager or as an onlooker he is there to unleash his power on our behalf the Lord of hosts is at our side and that being so we need fear no one and nothing one of my favorite Psalms Psalm 18 with your help I can advance against a troop with my God I can scale a wall it is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect he makes my feet like the feet of a deer he enables me to stand on the heights and so we've had

God's presence God's power and last of all we have God's pleasure the Lord your God is in your midst a mighty one who will save he will rejoice over you with gladness imagine God rejoicing over human beings he will quiet you by his love he will exult over you with loud singing and we must never ever forget that the Lord takes pleasure in his people if you are a Christian here tonight then know this God takes pleasure in you as an individual they are the apple of his eye he will take delight in you as it's put in the NIV as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride so will your God rejoice over you we read in Isaiah 62 but not only that he will rejoice over them with singing in Psalm 32 you will surround me with songs of deliverance imagine God singing with joy as he looks at his people

God takes no pleasure in disobedient sinners he doesn't rejoice over those who refuse to bend the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ he will not sing over those who see no beauty in his son of whom it says he is all together lovely many many years ago I think it was my late father-in-law when we got married he gave us one of these wooden plaques that you hang on the wall and it's got written on it from the Song of Solomon he is all together lovely and of course we were not Christians at that time and we didn't really want to have this on the wall because people would ask us awkward questions you know who is all together lovely so my wife put it in a drawer and it stayed there for many many years and then the night she was saved in 1987 she took it out and put it on the wall of our house and it's been there ever since he is all together lovely the Lord and Jesus

[ 28 : 14 ] Christ and God's pleasure God's pleasure is expressed over those who repent of their sin those whose great desire is to know Jesus who respond in love to his love who are obedient to him God rejoices in the presence of the angels we read in scripture over every man woman and child who comes to a living faith no parent delights in a way with son or daughter neither does our heavenly father delight in a disobedient child if you obey my commands says Jesus you will remain

in my love John 15 if you love me keep my commandments and of course at the end of the day God's greatest delight is to be found in his son his only son the Lord Jesus Christ and so many times in the New Testament Paul tells us that when we come to know Jesus we are in Christ and so when

God sees his son he's not only seeing his son but he's seeing those whom he has saved those who are in Christ and the father rejoicing over his son is rejoicing over his people also and God's greatest delight of course is in his son and then we read here he will quiet you with his love he will quiet you with his love isn't that a beautiful picture I remember when our first son Ian was born and at night if he couldn't sleep and I would put him in the pram and I would take him for a walk we lived in Balmedie at that time which is north of Aberdeen and 10 o'clock 11 o'clock at night I'm going along pushing the pram and I'm singing to my son in order to quieten him and I remember one occasion a police car came along and they paused beside me and they were looking on very suspicious what did

I have in the pram but it was nothing other than my son whom I was trying to get to sleep by singing over him God's great delight he will quiet you with his love a picture of God the father calming and soothing his children with songs of love just as a loving parent would do in order to calm a crying child and so God's presence God's power God's pleasure God's presence God's power God's pleasure not religion but relationship not ritual but love the love of God the love of a father for his children because that's what the Christian believer enjoys we're not engaged in religion we have a wonderful relationship relationship remember our first father and mother had a fist to fist relationship with God that's why

God created them not so that they could go off and lead a religious life he made them for himself for a relationship with himself and that's what we as Christians enjoy John writes in his first epistle how great is the love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God and then John says yes and that is what we are so may we know his abiding presence may we serve him in the power of the Holy Spirit may we be found obedient to his commands and may we bask in the amazing love of the God who rejoices over his people with singing may we live as his beloved children amen and may the Lord add his blessing to these thoughts and meditations on his word eternal and ever blessed Lord we thank you for these lovely pictures of your power of your presence and of your love a love that finds its expression in the giving of your one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life forgive us

Lord for anything said that has not been in conformity with your word and may the glory be yours and may the blessings be ours in Christ Jesus our Lord we thank you for our time together this Lord's day and we pray that you would watch over us and guide us in the days of the week that lie ahead until you gather us together once again forgive us Lord our every sin in Jesus name Amen we conclude by singing in Psalm 147 from Sing Psalms Sing Psalms 147 and that's on page 193 from verse 14 to the end of the psalm the Lord will grant you peace within the borders of your land and finest wheat will fill your fields from his sustaining hand to all the corners of the earth the Lord's commands proceed for when he speaks his word goes forth through all the world with speed [ 33 : 39 ] Psalm 147 on page 193 from verse 14 to the end of the psalm the Lord will grant you peace within the borders of your land the Lord will grant you peace within the borders of your land and finest feet will fill your fields from his sustaining hand to all the corners of the earth the

Lord's commands proceed for when he speaks his word goes forth through all the world we speed he spreads the snow as full the frost like ashes on the land he hurls forth high to hail like stones who can such hope withstand time but when he said his mighty work amidst the war winds blow the frozen water start to melt and once again to floor to take a glory he bears his word and makes his song his heart and absence he reveals to

Israel the Lord has not doubt his heart his heart heart such a way within the other race to us alone he shows his heart all praise the Lord all praise and now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father the fellowship and the communion of the Holy Spirit one God rest and remain with you all now and forever amen