

Study Prophecy – Become Prophetic (9) Zephaniah

Everyone, can you believe we're already in December—the very last month of 2025? I don't know about you, but sometimes it feels like I blinked and the whole year disappeared.

And just as quickly, our sermon series in the Minor Prophets is already in its ninth week. Only three more books to go.

But my prayer in this journey is not that we walk away simply knowing *more* about the prophets, but that we become *more* like them—people who speak **truth** boldly and **love** God and others deeply.

Say with me: **Speak truth boldly and love God and others deeply.**

Today, we open another powerful book—**Zephaniah** whose name means, “**Yahweh has treasured.**”

And indeed, this book is like a treasure box, and in a few moments, you'll see why I am saying this.

Before we get to that, I want you to ask this question first:

- Have I ever felt spiritually tired lately?
- Have I ever felt my heart growing colder these days, and I don't know why?
- Have I ever felt like I'm trying to be faithful, but somehow I just end up in the same place again and again?

If you've ever felt that way—**Zephaniah** is a treasure for you.

Before we jump in, let me help you avoid a classic Bible mistake—mixing up **Zephaniah** and **Zechariah**. Their names sound so similar that you might think they're brothers. But they're not. They didn't even live in the same century. Roughly they are 100–150 years apart.

Zephaniah ministered *before* the exile.

Zechariah ministered *after* the exile.

Here's an easy way to remember: in the alphabet, **N comes before R**, so Zepha-*N*-iah comes before Zecha-*R*-iah.

This is the same trick I use for Elijah and Elisha—J comes before S, so Elijah comes before Elisha.

And don't worry... even if you forget this, God still loves you.

Now, **Who Is Zephaniah?**

1:1: "The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of **Hezekiah**, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah."

If you have a good sense, you'll notice this a quite different introduction compared to other prophets. Because no other prophet in the Bible, except Jesus, the greatest prophet, gets a four-generation introduction like Zephaniah does.

And you may ask: Why four generations? Why not ten? Why not just one like all the others? And here's the reason why. Because Zephaniah wants you to see one name in his family line—**Hezekiah**.

Because Hezekiah was not just any ancestor; he was one of Judah's greatest kings, a leader who brought revival to the nation.

So by linking himself to Hezekiah, Zephaniah is like waving a big banner over his ministry, saying:

"Pay attention, everyone—You know Hezekiah? The greatest king of Judah? Guess what? He's my great great granddaddy. And that reforming spirit of Hezekiah runs in my veins. Just like him, I'm here for revival. I'm here for reform. I'm here to call God's people back home."

Hezekiah being his great great granddaddy means Zephaniah was not just a prophet—he came from **a royal family**. Most likely, he grew up in the royal palace.

So, if he lived today, he's like growing up in the White House. He calls J.D Vance his uncle. Karoline Leavitt his sister. Taking selfies with senators, diplomats, and foreign leaders.

So when Zephaniah confronts corrupt leaders—He's not talking about some strangers. He's confronting people he *knows*. The people he grew up with. The people who ate dinner over the table.

That's why many scholars believe Zephaniah's preaching helped spark king Josiah's revival.

Now, who is king Josiah? Just like his great-great-granddaddy, Josiah was a great king – a godly king – who brought a full-scale reformation to his nation: tearing down idols, repairing God's temple, renewing the covenant, and calling the nation back to God.

So, that collaboration between Zephaniah and king Josiah is such a beautiful picture of pulpit and people working together:

- The prophet preaches,
- The king and his people respond in obedience,
- And revival breaks out.

And that's what I believe can happen today – right here at Smith Chapel – because **what God did in the past, He can do it again today.**

So, picture this with me:

A pastor preaches the Minor Prophets. (Sounds like someone, right?)

The congregation responds with soft hearts.

And God uses that unity to spark revival.

And always, revival has never been about size or appearance.

It has always been about the heart. Our hearts.

I believe the Holy Spirit is still moving in and among us, still knocking on our hearts, still inviting us to remove the heart of stones but receive this new heart and a new spirit—so that we may love God and love our neighbors like never before.

So let's pray:

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us... Melt us. Mold us. Fill us. Use us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Martin Luther once said:

“We need to hear the gospel every day because we forget it every day.”

Everyone, do you know the gospel?

What is the gospel?

Gospel is good news.

Why is it good news?

It's good news because it's about what *God* has done for us—something we could never do for ourselves. In other words, God solved the problem we could never ever solve: our sin and our death.

But the most important question is, **“Is that gospel really good news for me?”**

“Is the gospel really the gospel to *my heart*?”

I bring this up because Zephaniah is all about the gospel. In fact, Zephaniah is the gospel in miniature.

And as we walk through this book today, you will see why—why this little book is such a treasure.

1. The Problem and the Consequence (Zephaniah 1:2–18)

First look how Zephaniah begins. It doesn't start softly. It actually opens with one of the most striking announcements in the entire Bible. It's like the moment you open this book, immediately, you'll find God throwing a 100-mile 4 seam fast ball right into your face.

“I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth.” (1:2)

It's a language of judgment – in a harsh tone.

And then He throws another fast ball in verse 3:

“I will sweep away both man and beast;

I will sweep away the birds in the sky

and the fish in the sea—

and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble.

When I destroy all mankind

on the face of the earth.” (1:3)

This sounds terrible. This sounds horrific. Because God basically says, “I will wipe out everything.”

And what's interesting about this part is God is describing it in a **reverse order of His creation**—fish, birds, animals, humans.

It's like God saying,

“Yes, I created them all. But I will undo what I have done.”

Why?

Because sin has filled every corner of God’s creation:

- **Idolatry** everywhere (1:4–6)
- **Leaders are corrupt and violent** (1:8–9)
- **Merchants are greedy and dishonest** (1:11)
- **People live in their lavish lifestyles. They dress up nicely. They decorate their house like a five-star hotel – only to serve their pride and ego.** (1:8–13)
- And worst of all, their **spiritual complacency**.

Look at what God says:

“I’ll find and punish those who are sitting it out, fat and lazy, amusing themselves and taking it easy, who think, *“God doesn’t do anything, good or bad. He isn’t involved, so neither are we.”* (1:12, MSG).

It says that people lived as if God didn’t care—or, more accurately, as if *they* didn’t really care about God.

Someone once put it this way: we like to stay in the driver’s seat, holding the wheel of our own lives. We put God in the passenger’s seat... or maybe we pushed Him to the backseat... or treat Him like a guest we invite only when we want. In other words, people treated God as if He is not really relevant in their everyday life.

What about us? Are we treating God as God? Is He truly in the driver’s seat of our lives—or have we placed Him somewhere else? Is there any spiritual complacency creeping into our hearts?

When prayer becomes optional,

worship becomes routine,

or sin begins to feel normal—

we quietly tell ourselves, “It’s fine... God doesn’t really care,” and we stop resisting temptation.

If that’s our story, then we are walking the very same path Judah walked.

And what’s the consequence?

The Day of the Lord becomes:

- a day of wrath
- a day of distress
- a day of darkness
- a day of destruction

And on that day, everything we trust—wealth, power, comfort—will burn like dry grass in God’s holy fire.

Zephaniah’s message is clear:

Sin always carries a consequence.

It’s so true that we reap what we sow.

- If we sow **faithfulness to God**, even if the fruit takes time, we will reap eternal life.
- If we sow **sin, self, pride, and pleasure without God**, the harvest will eventually be destruction.

I know this is heavy—but stay with me.

2. Human Attempts at a Solution (Zephaniah 2:1–3)

Because then comes a surprising invitation.

God says:

“Seek the Lord...

Seek righteousness...

Seek humility...

perhaps you will be sheltered

on the day of the Lord’s anger.” (2:1-3)

This is God’s call to repentance.

Even in a moment of righteous anger, God still opens the door of mercy—because His desire is not to condemn us but to give us life.

So God pleads with us: *If you want to live, turn back to Me. Repent.*

I’m sure you heard about repentance many times, but what is repentance?

“We need to hear repentance everyday, because we forget it everyday.”

Repentance is not regret.

It's not like you're saying:

"Lord, I'm so terrible." "Lord, I'll do it better." Or, "Lord, I promise that I won't do it again."

Repentance is not beating up yourself. Or, emotional tears without change.

No, repentance is simply a **U-turn**.

Let's say there is a man driving on the highway and he realizes that he had missed his exit. His wife gently said, "Honey... I think we're going the wrong way." But like many of us, he insisted, "No, no, don't worry. I've got this. I know the shortcut." And he kept driving. But the GPS keep saying: "Please make a U-turn."

And then again:

"Please make a U-turn."

Finally, he gives up, he turns around – and that very moment—turning around—that's repentance.

Beloved, is there anything God be saying today "Make a U-turn" in your life?

- Maybe in your attitude?
- Maybe in your habits?
- Maybe in your thoughts?
- Maybe in your relationships?

Repentance is not just feeling sorry—it's making a complete turnaround. It's changing who sits in the driver's seat of your life. It's saying, "God, I've been holding the wheel for far too long. I give it back to You."

"God, I've been chasing money, success, fame, worldly recognition, and people's approval all my life—but I'm turning back to You. You are my all in all. I will follow You."

My friends, when God calls us to repent, He is not pushing us away. He is pulling us **toward** Himself so that we can live.

God shouted out to His people again and again:

"Come home while there's still time. Don't wait until it's too late."

3. Yet the Problem Continues (Zephaniah 3:6–8)

But sadly, **Judah does not listen**. Judah doesn't repent. They remain stubborn.

Therefore, God says in 3:7:

“I thought, surely she will accept my correction...

But morning after morning she did the same things.” (3:7, MSG)

They did not make a U-turn.

But that’s not just Judah’s problem—

That’s human problem.

That’s *our* problem.

Because how many times have we:

- received second chances
- heard God calling
- felt conviction

...and yet, we still drifted back into:

- pride
- complacency
- religion without repentance

So God speaks again, this time God’s heartbreak turns to holy justice:

God says: **“Well, if that’s what you want, stick around. ... Your day in court is coming, ... My zeal is a fire that will purge and purify the earth.”** (3:8, MSG)

In other words, God finally declares His judgment.

And He is doing this—

**not because He enjoys our destruction,
but because of who He is.**

Our God is Holy so He cannot bless what is sin.

Now, let’s take a deep breathe here.

So far, what you have heard is this: humanity sinned, and the consequence was God’s righteous anger—“I will sweep away everything!” And yet, even then, God opened a door: “If you seek Me, you will live.” But the people’s heart is still hardened. They refused to make a U-turn. They stayed in their sins. So God declared His divine judgment.

Some of you may think, “Is this it?”
 “Is judgment the end of the story?”

And right at the moment when our sin, our stubborn hearts, and God’s righteous anger clash—and when the sky is filled with thunder, lightning, and heavy clouds—suddenly, a beam of light breaks through. **And that is exactly how the book of Zephaniah ends.**

4. God’s Final and True Solution (Zephaniah 3:9–20)

Starting from chapter 3:9, God begins speaking a whole new language.

A language of **hope**.

A language of **promise**.

A language that sounds like a heartbeat:

“I will...

I will...

I will...”

Fifteen times in this short book, God says, “I will.”

The whole story opens with an “I will” statement—

“I will sweep away everything” (1:2)

—but the book ends with a completely different “I will”:

Now, God says:

- “I will gather you.”
- “I will save the lame.”
- “I will bring you home.”
- “I will restore your fortunes.”
- “I will remove your shame.”

This is why Zephaniah is a miniature gospel.

Because the story does not end with:

- our sin,
- our rebellion,
- our failed attempts,

- or God's judgment.

It ends with **grace**.

God still says:

"I will do what you cannot do."

Everything needed for our salvation—

God says, "I will do it."

God says, "Even before the people change, **I'll move first.**"

"Even before they seek Me, **"I'll seek them first."**

"Even before they come to Me, I'll come to them first."

And friends—that is exactly the story of Christmas.

What was the world like when the first Christmas happened?

On that first Christmas night, the world was still wrapped in darkness.

People's pain was deep,

sin was heavy,

hope was fading,

and there were **no signs** that a great revival was about to break loose.

And yet—

God sent His Son, Jesus, to redeem and restore.

The message of Christmas is the message of Zephaniah:

Before we loved God—God loved us first.

Before we ever reached up heaven—God reached down to the earth as Immanuel.

God so loved a sinner like me that He sent His only begotten Son to die for myself on the Cross!

This is the heart of the gospel.

This is the heartbeat of Zephaniah.

This is the miracle of Christmas.

Losing that gospel in our sight is we put ourselves back to old slavery of sin and death.

It's like a life as Sisyphus from Greek mythology.

Sisyphus is well known for the punishment he received. His punishment was pushing a giant rock **all the way up to the top of a hill every day**. He had no other option but trying his best to push and push this massive rock up on a hill—sweat pouring, muscles trembling. But every time he reached the top, the rock rolled all the way back down!

So Sisyphus had to start over.

Again. And again.

No progress.

No finish line.

No rest.

Just endless striving.

Most of you may not know his name.

But you may know his feeling.

Trying to be good enough.

Trying to earn God's favor.

Trying to be Mr. Nice or Mrs. lovely.

Trying to push the rock of your own righteousness up a hill you can never surmount.

And every time you get close,

Every time you feel like, "I got this."

And then—

The rock rolls back down.

But here comes the good news.

That in Jesus Christ, this story changes.

You and I don't have to push the rock of self-righteousness anymore.

We don't have to prove ourselves.

Because:

The One who knew no sin became sin for us.

And carried the rock of our sins to the Calvary and died for us.

So, when He cried on that Cross,

“It is finished,”

He didn’t mean, “It’s halfway done, so keep pushing!”

He meant the rock is gone.

Forever.

So that we now rest—

not in our work,

but in His finished work.

Not in our hands,

but in His wounds.

Not in our strength,

but in His grace.

Beloved, earlier I mentioned that the name *Zephaniah* carries this stunning meaning:

“The Lord treasures you.”

Just sit with that for a moment.

What does God treasure?

You.

God treasures you.

God delights in you.

God literally sings over you. (*Zephaniah 3:17*)

God loves you with a love stronger than your doubts, deeper than your wounds, and more faithful than your past.

Through Zephaniah, God is whispering this to us again today.

Maybe you’re here and...

you feel tired.

Not just physically, but soul-tired.

Maybe you’re faithfully doing the Christian life but joy feels far away—
gratitude feels thin—

love feels like it’s slowly evaporating.

If that’s you, hear the voice of God:

“Come back to the gospel!”

“I will do it.

I have done it.

I will keep doing it.”

In other words:

“You don’t have to carry this alone.”

And then Jesus steps in with His timeless invitation:

“Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.

For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

(Matthew 11:28–30)

Zephaniah declares:

“The Lord treasures you.”

May this be the final word spoken over your life—
today, tomorrow, and every day after.

I pray that the love of God,

the song of God,

the joy of God,

would go before you and surround you

in ways you can feel, notice, and name.

And I pray you would know—deep down—

that your salvation isn’t something you strive for,
or earn,

or muscle your way into.

It’s something **God Himself completes.**

So may you walk out of this place lighter today walking with Jesus.

Filled with joy, gratitude, and unwavering confidence
that comes from being treasured by God.

Amen.

Reflection Questions

1. Where in my life am I still pushing the “Sisyphus rock”—trying to prove myself—rather than resting in what Christ has already finished for me?
2. What area of my heart is God calling me to “make a U-turn”—to repent and return to Him before it is too late?
3. How can I live this week as someone whom God treasures—letting His “I will” shape my identity, my decisions, and my relationships?