

“The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in His love He will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”

**- Zephaniah 3:17**

**Today’s Bible Verse:**

Zephaniah 3:17

**Today’s Theme:**

Let’s get rid of some misconceptions and distorted views we have about God. What if you knew that the Lord, your Heavenly Father, is with you and He is mighty to save? What if you knew that He passionately pursues after you while rejoicing over you by singing?

**Translation Used For This Lesson:**

New International Version

**Illustration (Part ONE)**:

I once found an article in Reader’s Digest that spoke about a family who was pulled over by a stern-looking police officer. As the silhouette of this authority figure approached the vehicle with an arrogant strut, the driver patiently waited while questioning herself if she had done something wrong. It turned out she was only stopped for a routine seatbelt check but before leaving, this cop shined his bright flashlight towards the back where the driver’s six-year-old was seated. The officer said, “Would you put your hands up for me, buddy?” After the family was free to go, the father noticed that his son was visibly upset so he asked him what was wrong? The child replied, “I thought that man was going to shoot me!”

**Introduction:**

Unfortunately this is how some people think when it comes to their concept of a relationship with God. As if when the Kingdom shows up it will be like the presence of this policeman. The Holy Spirit will either shoot you down or begin to cite all of your offenses that you have committed, while writing you a ticket full of fines and consequences. The large sums of people who believe this lie think that they will be left unglued. They will be totally blown away with shame and condemnation by this God who apparently sits on a judgment seat day in and day out, hell-bent on teaching the world a lesson. This kind of wrong thinking will also lead you into a place of worship that has you bounded with shackles on your wrists, unable to fully enter into the fullness of His glory. Just like the little girl in our illustration above, these people can become uptight or even upset at the thought of raising their hand in worship to honor the King who is worthy of all our praise. Yet, is it fair to say, I have seen this same group of people at their favorite sports arena and/or concert with their favorite singer. I doubt this is a question of “personalities.” Whether it is a religious spirit, the fear of man or a wrong view of who God is and how much He loves us, their hands are tied down in fear or disbelief.

**Illustration (Part TWO):**

There is this back road to my house that I love to take. It rarely has any other drivers on this asphalt so I get to be queen of the road and have it all to myself. One morning while listening to my favorite song on the radio, sunroof down and the sunshine beaming, I saw the red and blue lights in my review mirror come out to play with me. Shocked (of course) and immediately scanning my MPH gauge, I thought the same thing our friend in the first illustration thought, “What did I do wrong?” It turned out that I rolled through a stop sign and the merciless police officer issued me a $275.00 ticket! I went to pay the fine on the assigned court date and I happened to bump into an old friend from high school. He asked me what I was doing at the courthouse and I told him about my run in with the unfriendly cop. He asked to see my ticket and noticed that his pal was the officer who issued me the fine. He picked up his phone, called the cop from his speed dial and within two minutes this ticket was completely dropped as a favor. Just like that, my $275.00 debt had been canceled, no questions asked! Phew, I certainly was glad and quick to accept the gift!

**Introduction (Continued):**

I purposely broke both of these illustrations into two parts because I wanted to compare them for you. Even though they are different stories, they are brought to your attention to show the difference in how some people may view God versus how He actually is. I already explained the first perspective in detail (illustration, part one). This second analogy explains a more accurate depiction of who God says He is. You see, even though we are guilty of sin and deserve to pay the penalty, like I deserved to pay that ticket for breaking the law, Christ instead stepped in for us and cancelled our debt. Just like that, no questions asked. Done. Settled. Period! He loves us and the cross screams that.

Today as we close the book of Zephaniah you might be asking yourself, “Didn’t we just begin?” Yes, you are right, but there are only a total of three chapters in this divine album. It might be known as a tiny book but it sure has a lot of bang! Like my dad used to always say to me, “Holly, dynamite comes in small packages.” In this lesson we are focusing on one little scripture that actually equates to a full stick of explosives. I think if you can grasp **Zephaniah 3:17** and allow it to morph into the marrow of your own bones, then you are way ahead of the game in understanding who God is and how passionately He pursues after you. Our focus on this specific verse is meant to blow up any religious or legalistic view that keeps you from an authentic relationship with Abba, Father!

**Transition:**

Before we move on I want to encourage you in something that, if not addressed with the body of Christ, could result in a distorted view on how we see God. The Holy Spirit NEVER makes you feel guilt with the intent to force you to change or else that would go against scripture. The bible clearly states that Christians do not walk in guilt or condemnation (Romans 8:1). Here’s the truth; Holy Spirit will sometimes use "conviction" as He guides you into all truth (John 16:13). There is a very big difference between guilt versus conviction. As believers we need to know the difference as Satan and his demonic hordes wage war in our minds. Guilt comes from the voice of the enemy and it sounds like this....

*"What is wrong with you? You are a bad mother for yelling at your child! Shame on you, you are horrible person! If you really were a Christian you would always respond in love."*

Now, conviction from the Holy Spirit sounds like this….

*"Holly, your harsh words towards your child does not encourage him or build him up. The way I have loved you is how I want you to work towards loving him. Go and ask your child for forgiveness and make it right because you are a good mother who cares a great deal for your children."*

Do you see the difference? It's HUGE! The Holy Spirit guides us in love through conviction, NEVER guilt (key word is “in LOVE”. There is no such thing as “guilt, in love.”). Guilt clearly puts you in shackles and makes you feel lowly and condemned. Guilt, shame, and condemnation are never, ever from the kingdom of God. They are never tools from heaven. It's a trap and is born of the enemy.

1. ***Guilt*** is a subconscious confession that you are NOT forgiven.
2. ***Condemnation*** is a subconscious confession that your life is worthy of judgment.
3. ***Shame*** is a subconscious confession that the thing you feel condemned over is still who you are.

And they (guilt, shame, and condemnation) are all three anti-Christ. This is what God has to say about the matter: "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* Romans 8:1. Hallelujah! Now the true question is: Do you believe it and does your mindset reflect that belief?

I explained this to a woman who knows the Lord and is a part of the body of Christ. She texted me her view and I thought it was important to share because I know many believers think that God is the one who makes them feel “guilty” for their behavior in order to get them to change. Here is her reply on this point:

“That is a great perspective as I have never been taught that. I come from an old school Catholic upbringing that leads me to believe that if I ever feel guilt, then it was God telling me to re-evaluate what I was doing wrong. Guilt has been my guide that has led me back to His path.”

This is a wrong view of God and yet many follow it as their truth. It is twisted, and I believe it is soaked in deception from the enemy. Satan is camouflaging himself in a cloak called “Guilt” and he is convincing the listener to believe it is of God. Sounds like another case of the wolf that disguises himself in sheep’s clothing if you ask me. What that wolf is really attempting to do is huff and puff and blow your house down! Guilt does not lead my friend back into the arms of the One who is mighty to save. If anything, it will lead her directly into the influence of her enemy. Guilt will drive a person to hide in shame and run from God like Adam and Eve attempted to do. I pray you chew on this piece of steak before you think of spitting it out. This truth will set the church free, with an easy yoke and a very light burden. Book it!

**Today’s Scripture Verse:**

“The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in His love He will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.” – Zephaniah 3:17

**Life Application:**

How mighty do you view God in your own life?

1. Is your God someone who stands afar and just watches what happens to you without any concern?
2. Is your God inactive because He already spoke two thousand years ago and chooses not to perform miracles any longer?
3. Is your God too concerned with bigger matters involving the world, than dealing with your small insignificant requests?
4. Is your God resistant or too weak to supply your every need, heal your head colds, give you food, clothing, or enable you to pay your bills?
5. Is your God consumed with ripping everything away from you in order to teach you a lesson?
6. Is your God withholding His love from you because you have made a bad choice?

If that is your picture of God, no wonder there is so much fear accumulated in the church today! I don’t know about you, but MY GOD IS MIGHTY enough to handle every situation that faces me! Not only that, but He is also mighty enough to turn it around for my good (Romans 8:28)! He beckons me to pour out my heart like water before His face (Lamentations 2:19) and desires that I approach Him with boldness as I come to His throne of grace with confidence, so that I may receive mercy and grace, NOT guilt nor condemnation (Hebrews 4:16). My God has arms of strength that are everlasting. He will cast out the enemies of my soul from my life that would attempt to destroy me (Deuteronomy 33:27). There is no reason to worry because just as He is faithful to feed the birds of the air or clothes the grass of the field, how much more will He provide for His daughter (Matthew 6:25-30)? He promises me that if I dwell in the shelter of the Most High, then I will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust (Psalm 91:1-2)! He whispers over me a beautiful melody, a song of promises (Zephaniah 3:17) that speaks to me like a warm cup of coffee on a cold winter day. He says, “Holly, because you love Me, I will rescue you. I will protect you because you acknowledge My name. You will call on Me and I will answer you. I will be with you in trouble; I will deliver you and honor you. With long life I will satisfy you and show you My salvation” (Psalm 91:14-16)!

**Commentary (Perception):**

Sometimes perception is everything. What is actually real and true does not even win the case in the makeup of our minds. It is perception that rules our way of seeing or understanding things. If you think something or it appears a certain way and you believe it, then it will color everything.

**Life Application:**

Several years ago I was invited to attend the “She Speaks Conference” that is hosted by Proverbs 31 Ministry. It is a workshop that is designed for women who are writers and speakers. In a nutshell, there were about three hundred women in attendance, all with the same calling, who had come together for a weekend. Oh, yes, there were a lot of darling outfits and scrumptious shoes coupled with lips that were running about two hundred miles per hour with very few breaths in- between the flow of words. I mean don’t forget, we were all gifted communicators and, of course, we are women! Sheesh! What a combination! My husband would suggest that to be a “deadly combination,” one that he would rather stay far away from for the sake of his poor listening ears.

You could imagine, with this type of estrogen, the whirlwind of approval-seekers hungry for acceptance with an appetite to fit in and stand out. On the first morning there were about twenty of us who congregated into a bus that carried us to the event. As each woman took their turn to introduce themselves to the group, this one woman who seemed to have it all together quickly and readily intimidated me. She spoke with such confidence, authority and an anointing that dripped off her lips and tasted like sweet honey to God. The more I listened, the smaller I felt. Coupled with her beautiful face, she appeared to have the confidence of David as he approached Goliath. Because of my perception of her there was this wall between us, which made it difficult to engage….until that evening. I was in the prayer room at this conference and “superwoman” walked in. I glanced in her direction and quickly looked back down in hopes that she didn’t see me notice her entrance. After a few minutes in prayer, I felt this tap on my shoulder and it was her. I gulped. She said, “Holly, may I share something with you?” Of course I welcomed her into my space and she comfortably sat next to me while grabbing a pillow close to her chest. She proceeded with a soft tone while gently tucking her hair behind her left ear, “Holly, I would like to be honest with you. The other day when you got onto the bus and you began to address the women, I became intimidated by your strength, confidence and beauty. Unfortunately it has created a boundary that I want to shatter right here, right now. My heart’s desire is to be able to connect with you.”

As you could imagine, my jaw hit the floor and I needed a sling to hold it in place. “Funny you should say this,” I replied. I was then able to share my heart with her and an immediate peace and connection invaded our space and came over us. We ended up partners for the rest of the conference, laughing with each other in great depths as we truly got to know one another. You see my perception of this woman and her perception of me had put a barrier in between our relationship. This wall was not because of anything real but, instead, because of what was perceived.

**Continue Commentary (Perception)**:

Are you beginning to figure out where I am going with this? To a certain degree, every person listening to the lesson has this going on in his or her relationship with God. As Zephaniah 3:17 reveals, God feels a certain way about us and He passionately pursues after us with singing. Yet some are inwardly convinced that God is like the police officer we read about at the beginning of our text. That He is a stern and unapologetic God who lurks around the corner waiting to bust you for your crimes. Some of you have Polaroid pictures that surface every time you hear the name of God and these perceptions are absolutely false. Naturally, how we perceive God will manifest in how we respond to Him. I mean really, how eager are you to pray to someone that you perceive as being down on you or someone who does not have your best interest at heart and only wants to judge you for your poor choices?

Where I have found my false perceptions of God begin to shatter is when I meet Him in the secret place and spend intimate time with Him, one on one. When I shut the door behind me, curl up in His lap and pour out my heart like water before the face of the Lord, THAT IS WHEN I FIND THE REAL HIM! The One from Zephaniah 3:17.

Before we conclude, here are some more facts I know about the One who passionately pursues after us:

1. **He is before all things**- Psalms ninety-two reminds us that even before the mountains were born or You brought forth the world from everlasting to everlasting, You are God! We also hear in Revelation 1:8, that He is the Alpha and Omega who was and is to come, the Almighty!
2. **He created all thing**s- Colossians one says that, he created all things. So that means all things in heaven, all things on earth, visible or invisible. All things were created by Him and for Him.
3. **He upholds all things**- Hebrews chapter one says that the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by the word of His power!
4. **He is above all things**- We have one God who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:6). Isaiah chapter four clearly states, “I am the Lord and there is no other, apart from Me there is no God. I will strengthen you even though you have not acknowledged Me. So that from the rising of the sun to the place of it’s sitting, men may know there is non-besides Me. I am the Lord and there is no other.”
5. **He knows all things-** Psalm 139 reports that before a word is even on my tongue, He knows it completely. While Jeremiah 32:27 say, “ I am the Lord, the God of all man kind, is anything too difficult for Me?”
6. **He accomplishes all things**- Isaiah 14:24, “The Lord almighty has sworn; surely as I have planned it, so it will be. As I have purposed it, so it will stand.” So if God plans it, He will bring it about! His purpose (word) that He sends forth does not return to Him void!
7. **He rules over all things**- 1 Chronicle chapter 29 says that all wealth and honor comes from the Lord and He is the ruler of all things. It is in His hand to give strength to all.
8. **He is in control of all thin**gs- I love how Job 42:2 says, “I know that you can do all things and no plan of yours can be thwarted.” So let this be a reminder that He is in control over all kings and rulers as well. Sometimes we get so worried about political affairs and we lose sight that “the kings heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord, He turns them which ever way He wishes” (Proverbs 21:1).

**Conclusion:**

Today, I hope we were able to chip away some of our perceptions about God and replace it with Zephaniah 3:17. How many of you can say that when you hear the name of God, the Polaroid picture that pops into your mind is of Him singing over you?

I will leave you with this last thought… In November of 2014 my husband began to wake up with Christian melodies playing in his head. It happened every single morning without fail and still continues. He learned that this was God’s loving way of waking him up each day. If he had the song that God sang over him that morning recorded on his phone, he would quickly get up and play the song out loud, in faith. This pleases God. May I suggest for you to ask the Lord to wake you up this way? It is one very fine alarm clock.