



Yogi Berra is known for his pithy comments, known as Yogiisms. Yogiisms very often state the obvious. Here are a few of my favorites:

- As a general comment on baseball, he said, "90% of the game is half mental."
- On why he no longer went to a restaurant called Ruggeri's: "Nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded."
- When Berra's Mets trailed the Cubs by nine games in the National League East, the Mets rallied to win the division title on the final day of the season. That's when he said, "It ain't over till it's over."
- When giving directions to Joe Garagiola to his New Jersey home, which is accessible by two routes: "When you come to a fork in the road, take it."
- On being the guest of honor at an awards banquet: "Thank you for making this day necessary."
- How about this one: "You can observe a lot by watching."

But my favorite took place after Berra explained what happened when he witnessed Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris repeatedly hit back-to-back home runs in the Yankees' seasons in the early 1960s. He said, "It's déjà vu all over again".

We've been studying the 12 Minor Prophets and you might be feeling a bit like "It's déjà vu all over again" because each of the Minor Prophets seem to focus on the same thing: judgment. We saw it in Hosea, Amos, Joel, Obadiah, Micah and Nahum. It's like you've sinned, God's mad, and unless you repent real fast he's coming to get you. Let's be honest, that message can be discouraging. What if we parented that way? What if every message we sent our kids was one of warning and impending judgment: "If you keep doing that, you'll be sorry. You're going to get it. Dad will be home at 6:00!"

That might work for awhile but it gets old. It's not even that effective. But here's something that may surprise you. These twelve prophets seem to have understood that. Why? Because in almost every case they end their message of judgment with a strong note of hope, promise and blessing. Take Amos for example. He ends with this: ***"I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God*** (Amos 9:1). And Micah ends with this:

"You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago." (Mic 7:21).

These are all promises of blessing. In every case God makes sure the last word isn't a word of judgment but a word of hope. It's like the very last verse in the Bible. Have you ever noticed what it says? Here it is: ***"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen"*** (Rev 22:21). Isn't that great? There's a lot in Revelation about judgment, but God's last word isn't about judgment; it's about grace!

The message of Zephaniah is no different. In some ways, it's one of the hardest messages of all the Prophets. But, as we'll see, against that dark backdrop, once again the brilliance and beauty of God's grace shines brighter.

The life and times of Zephaniah.

Who was Zephaniah? In v. 1 he gives us a detailed lineage. He says he was a descendent of King Hezekiah. That makes him the only prophet with a royal lineage. Because of that he most likely had access to the palace and even advised the King.

Zephaniah ministered during the reign of King Josiah. Josiah was the grandson of Judah's most wicked king: Manasseh. His 55-year reign brought the level of national depravity to a sickening new low. He set up pagan altars and idols in the temple. He shed innocent blood. He embraced the occult. He sacrificed his own children by throwing them into the fire as an offering to a false god named Molech. 2 Kings 21:9 says Manasseh seduced God's people so ***"they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites."*** He set Judah on a disaster course, heading straight for God's judgment.

But then, not long after Manasseh's death, his grandson Josiah became King. Josiah proves we don't have to follow in the footsteps of our fathers. When Josiah turned 16 ***"he began to seek the God of his father David."*** When he turned 20 ***"he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles and idols"*** (2 Chron 34:3). When he was 24, he got ahold of a copy of the law in the temple. It had been lost for decades. When he read it he wept because he saw how far short they all fell. He repented on behalf of his people and began to institute many of the things it told him to do. Because of Josiah, God said he'd stay his hand of judgment during Josiah's lifetime.

Now we don't know exactly if Zephaniah ministered before or after Josiah found the law. There's no doubt he supported Josiah

in his efforts. But Zephaniah also knew it was too little too late. And so, his words in this book are frightening.

Zephaniah's prophecy focuses on the coming Day of the Lord.

"I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the LORD. "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," declares the LORD,... (1:2–3).

Look how He begins. God says He's going to clean house. Some of the people may have been tempted to say, "It's about time God judged and swept away all those terrible, wicked people out there." But look what He says in v. 4: ***"I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem."*** We always want God to judge people out there, but God always starts here, in our house, with people like us who claim to know Him.

So Zephaniah predicts some major changes. He uses a term we've seen before: The Day of the Lord. He uses that phrase 25 times. It means God won't stand by and tolerate all the junk in the world. He'll set things right. It's like an intervention. When your friend or family member sinks into an addiction and can't see his way out of it, someone needs to get in his face and say, "Look, you're killing yourself and you're hurting everyone around you. We won't let you do this anymore." The Day of the Lord is a God-sized, global, earth-shattering, life-altering intervention. It happens to individuals and it happens to nations and eventually it will happen to the whole world.

The great day of the LORD is near—near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. That day will be a day of wrath—a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness—a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers (verses 14–16).

But God had a purpose in this. Three times in this book Zephaniah talks about a "remnant." God was cleaning house so that a faithful remnant of people would rise to the surface. Zephaniah called on this remnant to seek the Lord and suggested God would somehow shelter them in the midst of the storm.

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 (2:3).

It's interesting that Zephaniah's name means "the Lord hides" because that's what he's saying here: humble yourself and seek the Lord and He'll hide you, perhaps He'll shelter you. He says "perhaps" because we can never presume on God's grace. But

we know behind that "perhaps" is a gracious God who longs to shelter us. Someone sent me a photograph that depicts what he may be thinking of here. What a beautiful picture of how God longs to shelter his remnant.

Zephaniah's prophecy ends with a promise of restoration.

Judgment and doom don't have to be the last word for us. Chapter 3 can be the last word for us. Starting in v. 9 there's a description of a very bright future for this remnant. Like a lot of biblical prophecy, it has more than one fulfillment. It had partial fulfillment when Israel returned from exile after 70 years and rebuilt their temple. It also has a partial fulfillment today in what God is doing as He builds His church on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Then it will have a final fulfillment in a glorious period after the return of Christ, called the Millennium. I'm going to apply it to today, but as I do don't forget those other fulfillments were in mind as well. In 3:9-20 God says four things about this remnant.

"Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. 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. But I will leave within you the meek and humble. The remnant of Israel will trust in the name of the LORD. They will do no wrong; they will tell no lies. A deceitful tongue will not be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid" (3:9–13).

First of all, it will be a pure remnant coming from all the nations of the earth to worship Him. Notice this is a pure remnant. The proud, the haughty, the arrogant will be gone. The meek and humble are left; people who call on the Lord and trust in the Lord. God Himself will purify their lips. Our lips speak what's in our hearts. There will be no more lies, no more deceitful tongues. Notice also this remnant comes from far away. "From beyond the rivers of Cush (Ethiopia)." It's interesting that Zephaniah's father's name was Cushi and he was probably a Cushite. So this has a lot of meaning to him. The picture here is of Jews and Gentiles coming together to worship the Lord. People from every tribe, tongue, nation standing "shoulder to shoulder" worshipping Him in one accord. What a beautiful picture! Some of my most meaningful experiences of worship have been standing shoulder to shoulder with Africans, Dominicans, Filipinos and Cambodians singing to the Lord, sometimes with words I don't even understand!

How do we know we're part of that pure remnant? We know when we humble ourselves and turn to the Lord in repentance and faith He purifies us. He forgives us and makes us clean. He

gives us the righteousness of Christ as a gift. So ask yourself, have I humbled myself and cried out to Him and trusted in Jesus as my Savior? We also know when we do that He begins a process of changing us from the inside out. Old habits die hard, but as God begins to work in your life they do die. Your thought life changes. Your language changes. Your affections change. The things you used to enjoy; the things you used to laugh at; the things you used to be entertained by change. You want to please God. When you sin against Him, and we all do, you feel convicted and you can't find rest until you confess it to Him. Your relationships change. You find yourself standing shoulder to shoulder with people you never would have associated with before. You find yourself drawn together and in close fellowship with people you used to despise.

Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you;" (verses 14–17a).

Second, it will be a joyful remnant because God will remove our enemies as a Mighty Warrior who fights to save us. God's people are addressed as a beloved daughter. We're to sing, shout aloud and rejoice with all our heart. Why? Because everything that used to terrorize us is gone. The Lord, the Mighty Warrior, has dealt with our enemies. We feared sin and the condemnation it brought. God dealt with that at the cross. ***"He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf."*** We feared the devil. He's a roaring lion who seeks to devour; a liar and a murderer. But he's a loser. Paul closed the book of Romans by saying ***"And the God peace will soon crush Satan under your feet"*** (Rom 16:20). Finally, we feared death. Hebrews talks about ***"those who all their lives are held in slavery by their fear of death"*** (Heb 2:15). But we don't fear death any longer because Jesus defeated death for us. Paul says ***"death has been swallowed up in victory"*** (1 Cor 15:54).

There's really nothing for us to fear. ***"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*** (Rom 8:31). There's so much fear today. We fear what will happen in the stock market. We fear what will happen to our kids. We fear a terrorist attack, an earthquake or cancer. But God is a Mighty Warrior who fights to save us. There was a picture floating around the internet of an Army soldier holding an Iraqi boy and protecting him from a fire. That's the picture of God here. He's a mighty warrior. And when we really come to grips with that the result is real joy. Not a TGIF kind of joy, but an everyday joy. Not a Happy Hour kind of joy, but an every hour kind of joy that even stays with us when hard times hit.

G.K. Chesterton saw the final proof of Christianity as being that it fulfilled our instinct for joy. He said unbelievers are forced to find their joy in the small things of this earth while the closer they get to the heavens, to the ultimate issues of our existence, the sadder they become. He says, "When the pagan looks at the very core of the cosmos he is struck cold. Behind the gods, who are merely despotic, sit the fates, who are deadly. The mass of men have been forced to be gay about the small things, but sad about the big ones." In contrast to that he says Christianity proves true because, "by its creed joy becomes something gigantic and sadness something special and small." Life's blows make us sad, but when we look at the core of the cosmos we find a sovereign and loving God working out His perfect purpose in our lives. Chesterton concludes by saying, "Joy, which was the small publicity of the pagan, is the gigantic secret of the Christian." So we should sing, we should shout aloud, we should rejoice with all our hearts!

Third, it will be a loved remnant because God will delight in us and rejoice over us with singing. Look at the last part of v. 17, ***"He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."*** Did you hear that? God takes great delight in you. Have you ever thought God delights in you? Let me ask this: Do you think God likes you? I didn't ask: Does He love you? That's too easy. You know the spiritually correct answer. But "Does he **like** you?" What does God feel when He thinks of you? Disgust? Anger? Disappointment? Some of you had fathers or mothers who treated you with contempt and un-delight. You can't imagine God any other way. Perhaps you were abandoned, abused or neglected. You wonder if God feels anything towards you.

But look what it says: ***"He will take great delight in you. In his love he will no longer rebuke you."*** I look at my life and I know there's a lot in me to rebuke; there's a lot wrong with me. But God doesn't see that. He sees me in His beloved Son. Remember what God the Father said to Jesus at His baptism? ***"You're my beloved Son; in you I am well-pleased"*** (Mk 1:11). The wonderful truth of the Gospel is the Father is as well pleased with me as He was with His Son, because I'm in Him and He's in me. My father is almost 87 years old. He lives in Sacramento so I don't see him a whole lot. But when I do see my dad he looks at me and I know he delights in me. He kind of just beams at me. He gives me a big hug and tells me he loves me; he's proud of me. He delights in me. Because of Jesus, our Father delights in us; He beams as He sees us.

But that's not even the most stunning thing about what it says here. It says He delights so much over us ***"he rejoices over us with singing."*** All over the Bible we're told to sing to the Lord. Singing is a way we express our love to Him. When we sing to Him we adore Him, praise Him and show our gratitude to Him. That

makes sense to me. But never do I recall reading that God sings over us. What makes God sing? You do. His joy over you! Can you believe that? My kids are all pretty much grown up but I can remember when each of them was born, holding them in my arms and singing over them, rocking them and quieting them as they fell asleep in my arms.

In fact, I have a whole history of singing over my kids. Did you ever think that God has a history of singing over you? He sang over you when you were still in the womb. He sang over you on the day you were born. He sang over you when you went to school. He sang over you when you felt hurt and alone. He sang over you when you tried to walk away from Him. He sang over you when you first turned your heart towards faith in Jesus. God still sings over you—when you ache, when you doubt, when you're tired and feel like giving up, when you fall into sin, when you're serving God. God has a lullaby just for you. God has a history of singing over you.

“I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you. At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame. At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,” says the LORD (verses 18–20).

The last thing we're told here is it will be an honored remnant because God will regather us home. That might sound like I'm taking this thing too far. I mean, aren't we supposed to honor God? How can God honor us? When Israel was scattered they were a reproach, but God brought them honor in the eyes of all the peoples of the earth when He brought them back. The greatest honor that God gives to us is He promises to gather us as His own and bring us

home. Jesus said when He comes again He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call **“and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other”** (Mt 24:31). Later, Jesus said He was going to His Father to prepare a place for us and He promised to come again and bring us to that place He called home (Jn 14:1–6).

This is the last word: not judgment but grace! And right here in the Minor Prophets! I guess none of this should surprise me because there's a story Jesus told that really brings all of this together. It's a story about a father and a son. You know the story. The son insulted his father and ran off with his inheritance, lived a wild and rebellious life filled with wine, women and song. But then he ran out of money and the only job he could get was feeding pigs, and the pigs ate better than he did. So he decided to go home and try to make amends with his father. He had this whole plan worked out in his head that he'd apologize to his dad, take his lumps and work his tail off to pay everything back. But to his surprise his dad was waiting for him and when he saw him he ran out to meet him. He didn't rebuke him, he embraced him. He delighted in him. He was overwhelmed with joy over his son. And he welcomed him home and honored him. He put a special ring on his finger, gave him the best robe to wear and a new pair of sandals for his feet. Then he invited everyone to a party; a feast. He said to kill the fattened calf and let us eat and be merry. And it says there was music and dancing and I'll bet even singing. It doesn't say he sang over his son, but I know he did.

What amazing grace this is! The Father's last word isn't to rebuke us but to rejoice over us in love; to delight so much in us that He sings over us and He even honors us by bringing us home.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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