**Joy**

 ***14****Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!****15****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.****16****On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak.****17****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.****18****I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.****19****Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.*

***20****At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before our eyes,” says the Lord. (Zephaniah 3:14-20, ESV)*

 The birth of Jesus is cause for joy among God’s people. Greetings dear brothers and sisters as we talk today about the reasons for rejoicing in Christ’s birth. O, how we need the Lord’s joy as believers! How this world needs to experience true joy, but rather wanders aimlessly in spiritual darkness and gets lost… Today, we’re going to talk about the joy that is caused by Jesus’ birth. We’re talking about what kind of joy it is, and the images we can use to be able to comprehend and experience this joy. Again, Jesus’ birth is a reason to rejoice for all of us. Let’s talk, then, about this a bit more…

 The main reason for joy (because of the birth of Christ) is the complete turnaround of our life-trajectory. Let me explain from the passage: God had felt the suffering and the weight of judgment on His people. They were in dire straits, and there was no longer any other solution to their problems other than The Messiah showing up to save them. It is here that the Prophet Zephaniah, at the end of his prophecy, conveys God’s promise to whomever would listen. In short, he was saying that even in that terrible situation, the remaining faithful Israelites were going to see their enemy driven away. They would not see the evil deeds that they had seen previously, ever again. Israel would not have a reason to fear, because the Lord Himself was about to come to save her – and that salvation would be a cause for joy among the people. God was going to fulfill the dreams of the people. Those were dreams of peace and stability – dreams of unity and not endless suffering under Egyptian rule or wandering around in dangerous Arabian deserts. No, God Himself was going to intervene in their history and punish those who caused them suffering, even to the point of miraculously making the lame walk and gathering in the outcasts. In short, the Lord was going to be their Shepherd; He was going to cause them to have a good reputation for His own glory’s sake. It was the Lord who was going to be their Emancipator and Savior.

 Sometimes, when you trust another to do a job, they do not complete the task the way you want it done. For example, you trust a co-worker to have a report ready for you to use for your meeting that day, but the information on it may be incomplete or missing important facts. Or perhaps you let a cleaning company come to give your house a nice cleanup, but they don’t do the job well. In the Scripture’s case, God did not only see that his people’s trajectory was wrong, but He also saw that they were spiritually bound. Thus, it was absolutely necessary that He intervene in-person. That’s when Jesus arrived on the scene and was oddly received more by foreigners than his own people. It was strange that he chose twelve Israelites, and one turned out to be a traitor while ten of the eleven others were murdered before their time for their faith by their own very people. But Jesus’ mission of salvation did not stop because of that setback; rather, it continued to spread to all people through those that accepted Him.

 Today, the Lord’s promise to us is the same. He came, and though we have people that do not rejoice at the freedom, people who are still afraid of death or are indifferent to the Lord’s victory over sin and death, as if their sins were not going to be forgiven, still you and I today have reason to be joyful. Our Savior arrived, and that means inner freedom, joyful service in that same freedom, and especially free and joyful worship. When that joy grows in us day by day as a revelation of Him, then we will find that God works through us even more. It is then that we become heartfelt servants, generous givers, people with clean hearts and words.

 Glory to God, He has freed us by Christ’s arrival on the scene. He has forgiven us through Jesus. He has gathered us as His flock as the Good Shepherd, and has punished our enemy, the devil – who will never be able to steal the believer’s salvation from them. Let us rejoice, and may the world see that there is joy in Jesus. The Lord bless you all. Amen.