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| **SERIES** | Arrival |
| **BIBLE** | Zephaniah 3:14-20 and various cross-references |
| **TITLE/TOPIC** | Joy is here |
| **OVERVIEW** | For all the celebration that comes with Christmas itself, there is also the longest night of the year. Even if the most celebratory holiday can still include stress, weariness and even bouts of conflict. Life can indeed be difficult, and strangely, Christmas can remind us of that. But most importantly, it reminds us that God offers and gives joy. It doesn’t matter how fun our holiday celebration is - joy from the Lord is greater. It doesn’t matter how low the holiday season may be - joy from the Lord pierces through. At the end of his oracle, Zephaniah the prophet gives a word from the Lord to Israel about joy during their exile. His message is a word of encouragement we need as well! |
| **SCRIPTURE BREAKDOWN** | **What is joy?**  “Joy represents a sense or feeling of gladness, elation, or happiness in the Bible. It is an inward reality that may express itself outwardly. Joy is a response to God and/or circumstances.” – Lexham Theological Wordbook  “I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that any one who has experienced it will want it again. Apart from that, and considered only in its quality, it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is the kind we want. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is. - C.S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy” (see [THIS](https://jacovanrossum.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/1a-c-s-lewis-joy.pdf) article)  “…one second of joy is worth 12 hours of Pleasure.” – C.S. Lewis  **Find joy in God’s grace –** Zephaniah 3:14-15  14Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! 15The 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.   * This section of the book is coming after 2 ½ chapters which call out the people for their idolatry (1:4-6), for their not pursing the Lord (1:9), for their complacency (1:12), for their pride and rebellion (3:1-3). There are consequences to their sin, and vivid descriptions are given showing Israel what their sins have brought upon themselves. * 3:14-15 can’t be read separate from 1:1-3:13 🡪 their own actions have created a joyless existence. * Into the midst of their reality, God offers grace and restoration. God will change their joyless existence into one defined by joy. Compare this to David’s prayer of confession in Psalm 51, specifically 51:8. * We must mourn the reality of our sin, but find joy in God’s forgiveness and restoration. * See James 4:8-10, 1 John 1:9 and Psalm 32:1-2   **Find joy in God’s presence –** Zephaniah 3:16-17  16On that day they will say to Jerusalem, “Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. 17The 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.”   * This is an OT picture like what we see with the father at the end of the prodigal son story. The father celebrates because the son who was lost and dead is now found and alive (Luke 15:21-24). The father in the parable wants to celebrate, Zephaniah tells us God rejoices over us with singing. * When we are in the presence of God, in the presence of one who is a saving warrior, who takes delight in us – who He is removes fear. The presence of God is a no-fear zone. * See Psalm 21:7, Psalm 30:12, 2 Timothy 1:7, Romans 8:15   **Find joy in God’s promises –** Zephaniah 3:18-20  18“I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you. 19At 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. 20At 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.   * To experience the grace and presence of God are only possible because of God; he takes the initiative, and he makes it possible. Now He communicates what He will continue to do, the God that He IS. * The promises of God are truths we cling to and find hope in. They give us perspective and comfort and hope of what is to come and how to navigate the difficulties as we wait their fulfillment. * In the midst of a season that feels like exile, whether brought on by ourselves or others, we navigate by pursuing our promise keeping God. He tells us clearly who He is so that we can seek Him, follow Him, trust Him, find comfort him. * See Zephaniah 2:3, Matthew 6:33, Colossians 3:17, James 1:5, Philippians 4:6-7 |
| **GOSPEL** | John 15:9-11  Matthew 13:44 |
| **NEXT**STEPS | **Begin**- find peace in Christ, die to old life and rise into a new life | **Connect** & **Grow**- Keep in step with the Spirit together with others to focus on Christ and live in peace. |