

⁷ Be silent in the presence of the Lord GOD,
for the day of the LORD is near.

Indeed, the LORD has prepared a sacrifice;
he has consecrated his guests.

⁸ On the day of the LORD's sacrifice
I will punish the officials, the king's sons,
and all who are dressed in foreign clothing.

⁹ On that day I will punish
all who skip over the threshold,^[a]
who fill their master's house
with violence and deceit.

¹⁰ On that day—
this is the LORD's declaration—
there will be an outcry from the Fish Gate,
a wailing from the Second District,
and a loud crashing from the hills.

¹¹ Wail, you residents of the Hollow,^[b]
for all the merchants^[c] will be silenced;
all those loaded with silver will be cut off.

¹² And at that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps
and punish those who settle down comfortably,^[d]
who say to themselves:

The LORD will do nothing—good or bad.

¹³ Their wealth will become plunder
and their houses a ruin.

They will build houses but never live in them,
plant vineyards but never drink their wine.

¹⁴ The great day of the LORD is near,
near and rapidly approaching.
Listen, the day of the LORD—
then the warrior's cry is bitter.

¹⁵ That day is a day of wrath,
a day of trouble and distress,
a day of destruction and desolation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and total darkness,

¹⁶ a day of ram's horn and battle cry
against the fortified cities,
and against the high corner towers.

¹⁷ I will bring distress on mankind,
and they will walk like the blind
because they have sinned against the LORD.
Their blood will be poured out like dust
and their flesh like dung.

¹⁸ Their silver and their gold
will be unable to rescue them
on the day of the LORD's wrath.
The whole earth will be consumed
by the fire of his jealousy,
for he will make a complete,
yes, a horrifying end
of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Silence is golden. It is. Working in the wood shop I would wear ear protection all day. It was nice, my little cocoon of quietness. It became so comfortable that even today I walk around wearing them in the garage, in the garden, and even in the house. Silence means there isn't noise, nothing to attend to, and I can think.

But silence with children is also suspicious. It means they're getting into trouble. They're trying to sneak a look at their Christmas presents. They're trying to get away with something. And that's what we find from Israel but they thought they really were getting away with everything. They weren't even being quiet about it. They've become practical atheists proclaiming, "*The LORD will not do good or evil.*" They were busy, prosperous people. They weren't silent by any means.

and neither was God. But before they could hear him speak something had to happen. If the children are running throughout the house, radio at full volume, screaming and chasing one another something needs to be done. Quiet! Zephaniah interjects, "*Be Silent in the presence of the LORD God.*" Silence is golden because it means the people are listening. Silence is golden because it means God is speaking.

Zephaniah is a small book found among the minor prophets. Minor, not because they were less important, but because they wrote less. The minor prophets came in quick succession, what we have are their sermons. God was taking a shotgun approach, trying to get his people to listen to his warnings. The book of Zephaniah starts with "*Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedalia, son of Amariah, Son of Hezekiah...*" That gives the setting and the time of the prophet. It meant that Zephaniah traced his genealogy back to Hezekiah, probably the same King. It tells us that Zephaniah prophesied during the time of Josiah king of Judah. It's possibly that they were cousins. But times were so bad that they had lost the Word of God. Imagine their shock when Josiah began remodeling the temple, taking care of it when they stumble upon the book of the Law. They found the bible in the church and everyone is shocked.

Josiah ordered Hilkiah the high priest, to remove from the temple of the LORD all he articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. (2 Kings 23:4). Not since the days of the judges nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel had any Passover been observed. (2 Kings 23:22). Josiah tears down the Asherah from the house of the Lord. He removed the houses set up for the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the Lord. He desecrated and defiled the high places so that Israel could no longer sacrifice their sons or daughters to Molech. It's bad and they needed to hear the law.

Zephaniah starts with, "*Be silent in the presence of the LORD.*" "hush" (שׁוּט) in v. 7 implies a shock and awe of silence in the presence of God (Hab 2:20). In the presence of this judge, there is nothing to say! There are no excuses to offer. But why should they be silent? Zephaniah tell us, "*The day of the LORD is near and the LORD has prepared a sacrifice. He has consecrated his guests.*" So what's the LORD sacrificing? The sacrifice (v. 7) suggests that Judah now will be offered as a sacrifice, with the nations watching. His guests are Babylon. And this is what the Lord will do on the Day of his sacrifice punish the officials and those who are dressed in foreign clothes. That sounds odd to us. But it's not the wearing of clothes that is to be condemned but the fact that they, God's chosen people, set apart and distinct from the surrounding nations, admired and are influenced by the customs and beliefs of the heathen nations. This is a sign of their rejection of God as well as the skipping over the threshold.

Zephaniah describes this day as an army advances against Jerusalem from the north. They enter through the Fish Gate and the alarm is sounded. Babylon makes their way South through the second district and on into the market place. And here, there is silence but this isn't your typical silence (v. 11). This is the eerie unnatural unbelief of what has just happened. There is no escape. The LORD himself will search every nook and cranny in the same way an invading soldier searches the city. he searches specifically for those who are complacent and apathetic towards the LORD. In verse 14, Zephaniah calls us to be silent and to listen, *the day of the LORD* is so close you can hear it – *the warriors cry is bitter*. They will come. While Israel experienced judgment in 586 BC with the destruction of their city Zephaniah is looking ahead to the end of the world. *That day is a day of wrath. 6 days of destruction and darkness.* A day of silence that is far from golden.

Sounds terrible, but we're not that bad. Somehow it feels as if Zephaniah is still screaming at us from over 2500 years ago. But there is no male prostitution ring carried out in the fellowship hall and the ladies' guild isn't weaving anything for Asherah. Is there anything we need to listen to here? Absolutely.

If we're honest there is much in our culture over which to mourn. The running joke among some comedians and even prophets of atheism is that God will do nothing either good or bad. If there is a God why doesn't he do something. They'll curse God, mock God, deny God, and tempt him with such statements as, "If there is a God why doesn't he strike me dead." I wouldn't want to be them. But to be honest we do something similar when we think we'll get away with sin. Sometimes we're silent like children getting into things they know they shouldn't be in. Sometimes we'll keep quiet and won't tell anyone when we know we are sinning. Maybe we're louder and sinning openly for all to see because God is far removed from his creation and he doesn't know or care about our sins. We may even become practical atheists thinking, "God won't do anything either good or evil." Tempting God, "If you're there... do something. Heal my sister. Save my Father. Remove this cancer.

Show yourself and then maybe we'll believe in you. (God is not a man that he should be ordered around as our servant) We too wonder where God is at in this world. Maybe we even begin to expect nothing of him. Today is today and tomorrow will be more of the same. God will do nothing.

Zephaniah calls us to be quiet. This call to be silent extends to us. When our mouths are moving, and our thoughts are active, even accusing, we're not listening. The first command Israel received was to, "Hear, o Israel, the Lord your God, the LORD is one." This God is as Zephaniah's name reminds us – The LORD is hidden. Why is he hidden? Because his people are sinful and they can no longer stand in the presence of the Almighty God. But, I know where he reveals himself.

Not in our inner thoughts, emotions, feelings, but in his Word. Which is lost, forgotten, neglected, and pushed aside. But Zephaniah pleads, 'Don't say anymore, bow down, repent. If you don't. You will be destroyed. God is serious about sin. God is doing something about it. No one escapes the judgment, from the priests and participants in false worship (v. 4), to the royal house (v. 8), to the merchants (v. 11), and to the general atheists and agnostics who say, "God is irrelevant" (v. 12).

Silence is only golden for so long. God breaks the silence. He comes into our world and his message to his people. The reason God wants us silent is so we can hear him speak. It's the first command God gave through Moses, "*Hear oh Israel,*" (Deuteronomy 6:4). There were blessings associate with listening to the Word of the LORD. If they listened they would remain in the Promised Land but if they failed to listen they would be removed from the land until they would listen.

Zephaniah is much like John the Baptizer. He is calling one and all to repentance. This is how serious God is about sin. He is coming. and v. 18 reads, "*Their silver and their gold will be unable to rescue them on the day of the LORD's wrath. The whole earth will be consumed by the fire of his jealousy, for he will make a complete, yes, a horrifying end of all the inhabitants of the earth.*"

Zephaniah mentions *the fire of his jealousy*. The hidden God is revealed in his love. The reason God is warning his people through Zephaniah is because of his love. Jealousy assumes a relationship. Jealousy is coveting a person, someone you love. He is a God who is jealous of his people. He is jealous because he wants what is best for them. Why would God send Zephaniah if he didn't love them? God could have written them off, "I gave them my word. They lost it. They blew it. I'm done."

Instead God acts. He does something good. He speaks God restores his creation. Creation is taken away. Notice the 6 days that Zephaniah speak about. This day of the LORD will sweep everything away both man and beast. What the first man messed up, the second Adam has come to restore. There is another sacrifice he has prepared through his people Judah. Judah reduced down to one. God has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated those who are coming. Because he is a jealous lover, who loves in spite of everything you've done wrong. He loves in spite of the fact that you've loved other gods, someone else, and yes it hurt him. But you will find *no greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* (John 15:13) God loved the world so much that he sent his one and only son so that you might have life. He took that wrath and punishment upon himself.

God loved the world so much that he does something in disciplining his children. The hardest thing to do is discipline your child. They'll often think, "They don't love me anymore." They might even say, "I hate you." but it's what they needed. Maybe they listened. We don't know if Zephaniah was written before or after Josiah's reforms but I'd like to believe that Zephaniah influenced the king. That his Words were heard and Josiah did all he could to turn the nation back to the Lord but in spite of all his effort more evil kings would follow and the servant of the

Lord, Babylon would come for a reason and a purpose to bring them back and restore them. Sometimes God uses a 2x4 sometimes he uses a lot of noise so we listen.

But either way you are invited, you are consecrated, You are given clothes, not foreign clothes but wedding garments. The robes of righteousness that Jesus has won for us. You are clothed in Christ when you were baptized in Christ. Everyone is waiting for God to act but fail to see how he has acted and done something about sin. He sent his son. He works through his Church bringing the message of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. He will act again when he comes to Judge.

Discipline isn't fun or comfortable but it is needed. God through his prophet has called you back. You can come back. Be silent. Not so that God can speak to us with a "still small voice" in our minds but so that we can hear the Word when we are silent. If we blabber constantly then we'll never hear the Word. By silencing our minds and quieting our thoughts, we are able to meditate on the Word that we pray. We chew on the words that we are given. We remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, (sacred, set apart).

Seek, the LORD and live. Seek the Lord in righteousness and humility. Hear the Word of the Lord, "You're sins are forgiven." Let it change your heart and mind. Make it a part of your life. The future is bright for us. Stand in silence as God speaks.

Silence is golden. I love the quiet. But even more than peace and quiet is the comfort we have in Christ because God has spoken. He has done something about our sin. He will again. The day of the LORD is not a day of terror but a day to lift up our heads as we see the day approaching. Amen.