

God is ... MIGHTY

God is ... #2 – Pastor Jonathan Combs – June 2nd, 2024 – Zephaniah 3:14-20

INTRO: Good morning church! We are continuing our sermon series this week exploring how to know God by getting to know some of his attributes. This week will be looking at how God is Mighty. Knowing God is the most important endeavor of our lives and truly what we were made for:

Series theme verse: John 17:3 (ESV) And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

The famous theologian and author J I Packer said,

“What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God... Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.” — Packer, J. I.. Knowing God (p. 19, 33).

We really like might (power or strength) as human beings. If you think about it, we celebrate some form of might in almost every aspect of life. That's why we celebrate sports because of athletic might or award Nobel prizes for intellectual might. We ourselves want to be powerful so we spend dollars and hours on fitness and we spend time and effort at learning to get mentally stronger. Might is definitely something we honor and desire.

Need: However, if we are honest then we know that there is a kind of might that we lack and can not attain though we long for it. You see, all forms of might allow us to do something, physically, mentally, emotionally. Might grants us a level of control. But ultimate might is control over things outside of one's self and over time. Its control over the past, the present, and the unknown future. Some of us suffer our pasts, some from the difficulties of today, and still others are anxious about tomorrow. And none of us have any control of those around us or our surroundings.

Do you feel out of control today? Are you immobilized by some fear, perhaps of some confrontation or some difficult step? Do you wish you were strong enough to face it? What if you had the might to control time and matter?

Trans: That's the joy of today's message. We can know God who is mighty in the ultimate kind of way. Of course He can lift every weight at the gym, outrun Usain Bolt and beat Ken Jennings in Jeopardy. His might is beyond this. And what is better is that He loves us with all His might.

BODY: In the book of Zephaniah, the prophet told the people of God that they could know God is mighty by recognizing His powerful deeds. We too can know that God is mighty by recognizing His powerful deeds. How can we know that God is mighty by recognizing His powerful deeds? The text gives three ways we can know that God is mighty:

TEXT: Zephaniah 3:14-20 (ESV) 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 your eyes,” says the Lord.

WE CAN KNOW THAT OUR GOD IS MIGHTY BY RECOGNIZING THAT:

1. He has taken away our sin.

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EXP: (14-15a) 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.

Let's begin first by looking at the key word of this whole passage and that is that God is mighty. He can take away our sins because He has the power to do it.

“A Mighty One” (17) (גִּבּוֹר, *gibôr*) - warrior, champion, chief, giant, man, mighty (man, one), strong. “Often translated ‘hero’ or ‘warrior’ ... it is used most frequently with military activities to describe one who has already distinguished himself by performing heroic deeds. So here the Divine Warrior has declared peace.” - Zephaniah: NAC Commentary, Bailey

“Sing, shout, rejoice, exult” (14) - four fast imperatives from the prophet to the people of God. Our response to the mighty acts of God ought to be worship. These imperatives describe the kind of exuberant gratitude that we will have when we understand what God has done and will do. When you receive amazing reward in the place of deserved punishment you will shout for joy and worship.

“Daughter of Zion” (14) - A name given to the chosen people of God. For Zephaniah it meant the people of Israel, scattered by Assyria and soon to be exiled by Babylon. For us it means the people of God scattered around the world.

“The Lord Has taken away” (15) (סָר, *sûr*) - to put aside, leave undone, retract, reject, abolish. God has already done this, He has already removed the judgments against Israel and will restore them. By the cross, He has also removed the judgments against us and by faith we can receive that forgiveness.

“The judgments against you” (15) (מִשְׁפָּט, *mišpāṭ*) - judgment; act of deciding a case, litigation (before judges); case, sentence. This is a judicial term to describe our problem. We would not hold up in court apart from Christ Jesus. The judgments lobbied against us are true and incriminating yet God has taken them away.

“Cleared away your enemies” (15) (אֵיב, *'ōyēb*) - adversary, enemy, foe. This word is actually singular in the Hebrew which means that it is more literally translated “enemy.” Certainly it is true that God cast out Israel's foes, but more importantly He defeats Israel's main foe and ours to. Oh ... you think you have no enemies, you most definitely have one and he hates everything God has made including you.

Ephesians 6:12 (NLT) For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

He is laying judgments against you nonstop:

Revelation 12:10 (NIV) [Of Satan] ... For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

ARG: But God has cleared our guilt, He has removed our sin:

Psalm 32:1-2 (NLT) Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!

Colossians 2:13-15 (NLT) ¹³ You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

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Jesus came to take away the judgments against you, to take away our sins:

1 John 3:5 (NLT) And you know that Jesus came to take away our sins, and there is no sin in him.

ILL:

APP: Does the past eat at you? Lay it at the feet of Jesus! He is mighty over your past, He has paid for your sins. Receive His forgiveness today by placing your faith in Him. Zephaniah tells us how to respond ... with worship. God has removed your sin and has cast away your accuser. Celebrate Him, praise Him, shout with all your being for our God who is this mighty!

WE CAN KNOW THAT OUR GOD IS MIGHTY BY RECOGNIZING THAT:

2. He is strengthening us by His presence.

EXP: (15b-17) ¹⁵ 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.

“Is in your midst” (15,17) (קֶרֶב, *qereḇ*) - in the midst, among. Our God is with us. Zephaniah gets a word like Isaiah that God is with us, Immanuel. The phrase is repeated to emphasize the effect. God’s might is not merely displayed by what he has done which is unseen or what He will do which is also unseen, but what He is doing now. His presence is with you.

Zephaniah 3:11-12 (ESV) 11 “On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will **remove from your midst** your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. 12 But I will **leave in your midst** a people humble and lowly.

“Never again fear evil” (15) (אַרֵּר, *yārē’*) - to be fearful, be dreadful, be feared, terrified. The presence of God is mighty to remove fear. If God is for us none can stand against us.

“On that day” (15) (יוֹם, *yôm*) - This is the first of several timing words which are set to point Israel to a future promise and to us another future promise. As with most prophecy, there is a present application and a future one. For Zeph and Israel, God will deliver His people from their oppressors. This also points to *Yôm Yahweh* (the day of the Lord) when God will fully save as He promises here.

“Let not your hands grow weak” (15) (רָפָה, *rāpā*) - fail, faint, be feeble, forsake, idle, slack, weak. There is a contrast here of our struggle in weakness and God’s perfect might. He is to be our strength.

“A Mighty One” (17) (גִּבּוֹר, *gibôr*) - warrior, champion, chief, giant, man, mighty (man, one), strong, hero.

“Will save” (17) (יִשָּׁע, *yāša*) - to be liberated, be saved, be delivered. He will do this from their physical enemies but far greater He will do this from our spiritual ones. Do you see it? He has removed our sin and He will ensure our salvation. He is mighty to see the promise all the way through.

“Will quiet” (17) (הָרַשׁ, *hāraš*) - to make silent, quiet, rest. His love will quiet your chaos, will silence your erratic thoughts. Oh, the beauty of his presence. He has the power to comfort you right now in the very areas of your pain. Have you taken every thought captive by turning your worry into prayer? Moving from self talk to prayer. He will quiet your chaos with His love.

“Will exult ... with loud singing” (17) - God is going to rejoice over me with singing? How delighted He is with His people that He would sing over them:

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Hebrews 2:11-13 (ESV) 11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, 12 saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” 13 And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

ARG: **God is our present strength and our present help:**

Psalm 46:1 (ESV) God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

God is our refuge, our strong fortress, in Him we trust:

Psalm 62:5-8 (ESV) 5 For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. 6 He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. 7 On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. 8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

ILL: Our God is a hero, when he steps on the battlefield, His people believe they can win. In ancient times, armies would sometimes decide the battle by letting their champions fight for their people. Achilles is a great example of this in Homer's Iliad. He wins battles for Achaea without the army having to bleed and his people believe in Him. This is who God is for us. He fights our battles in our place, He is our champion.

APP: Do your hands feel weak? Are you afraid of what you must face today? Have you been trying to face this life by you own might and found that you lack the strength to control any of it? Friends, we weren't made to live by our own strength but by His. He made us for Himself and to lean on His ever-present might. Turn your control over to Him now, trust in Him.

WE CAN KNOW THAT OUR GOD IS MIGHTY BY RECOGNIZING THAT:

3. He will gather us to Himself.

EXP: (18-20) 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 your eyes,” says the Lord.

“**Gather**” (18) (גָּדַף, 'āsaḇ) - to gather (harvest), to take in, receive into, collect, assemble. God is mighty to harvest all of His people unto Himself. None will fall through His fingers.

“**Mourn ... Lame ... the outcast**” (18-19) - those who suffer here will not suffer in His presence. He will gather us to Himself now and bring us rest and relief, but in the future He will gather us in glory and give us this in perfection. We are commanded to partake in His work:

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV) And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

“**All the peoples of the earth**” (20) (אֲמֵ, 'ām) - nation, people. All nations and all peoples will be gathered to Him. Now this part seems the most like future prophecy of all the promises here. This part simply did not happen in Israel and must be yet to come. Barnes certainly sees it this way, “‘That time’ is the whole time of the Gospel; the one ‘day of salvation,’ in which all who shall ever be gathered, shall be brought into the new Jerusalem.” (Barnes' Notes on the Bible)

Zephaniah 3:9 (ESV) “For at that time I will change the speech of the **peoples** to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord.

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“Restore your fortunes” (20) (שְׁבוּתָ, *šəbūtā*) - exile, prisoners; figuratively, a former state of prosperity. This means literally that God will take away our captivity perhaps foreshadowing that “he led captivity captive.” (Eph. 4:8) What former state of prosperity? Does He mean Israel’s former glory? Not really, no He is returning us to a much former glory, that is, the time when man walked with God in the cool of the day.

ARG: God is gathering His people now and we ought to yield to this work:

Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV) 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

God is mighty to gather us from every people in the last day:

John 6:39 (ESV) And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

Revelation 7:9 (NLT) After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb.

ILL: This idea of gathering is synonymous with harvesting. I’ve become more and more fascinated with gardening and farming. I enjoy that kind of work and it reminds me of good times with my Papa. I recently read an article from the USDA that about “30 percent of global food loss occurs at the agricultural production and harvest stage.” That means we are imperfect at the gathering of our crops, some are lost in the harvest. I’ve experienced this myself, I’ve not harvested all my tomatoes in time and lost them to the elements. We are imperfect harvesters.

But God is perfect in this. He will not lose one but will gather us all.

APP: Do you have anxiety about your future? Even if you sat through the most recent series about heaven, do you feel unsure about beyond? God is mighty to save but is also mighty to finish His work. Do you trust Him? Do you trust that God will restore you fully? Do you look for ways to get in sync with what He is already doing in gathering His people? His word says:

Colossians 3:16 (ESV) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

1 Corinthians 14:26 (ESV) What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

CONCLUSION: Our God is Mighty! Far beyond physical or mental strength, He has power over the universe, over all space and matter and over time itself. Will you lay down your attempts to control your life with your own limited might and trust the Lord? Will you trust in His might over your past, present and future? Will you know Him who took away your sin, strengthened your hands with His presence, and will bring you to Himself and will not fail?

Let’s pray.