

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I want you to take a few seconds and think of who you would consider to be a warrior. Maybe it's someone close to you, someone you consider to be a hero, who has been through a lot in their lives, endured the hardships, and now is a stronger person because of it, such an inspiration. Maybe your warrior is someone in the military, who either serves or did serve and fight to protect our freedoms.

You know, the movies often portray warriors as those who face enemy after enemy, and they just can't lose. They just can't die. They wipe out the enemies, usually to free the damsel in distress or to save their country or city or home. The warrior is the one that the ruler depends on to get the job done, no matter how badly the odds might be stacked against them.

Well, for our Redeemer's resume this morning, the prophet Zephaniah has an addition. Jesus, the Warrior. Jesus, Our Warrior, Mighty to Save.

Now, let's face it...this wasn't the first time the Israelites were needing to be saved, and it definitely would not be the last. If you read the first couple of chapters of Zephaniah, not a long book, you'll see, by his words, that the Israelites were in big trouble. Warning after warning, punishment after punishment, and the Israelites still didn't get it. They refused to turn from their sinful ways and obey God.

So God was going to punish them, and this time the punishment was going to hurt, a lot. You see, Zephaniah was one of the many prophets who foretold the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian Empire. He calls it "the day of the LORD," a day of approaching judgment. Here's what he had to say about it, "For that day I (God) will stand up to testify...and pour out my wrath on them – all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger."

But yet, in the face of all this doom and destruction, God still gave his people a little glimmer of hope. In a prophecy that is dominated by devastation, punishment, fierce judgment, Zephaniah concludes on a high note with a short message of comfort, encouragement, and deliverance. "On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me..."

God was promising a remnant would survive his judgment. His love would shine forth, he would forgive the wrongs of his people, and they would be saved!

Obviously good news, right??? I think Zephaniah thought so. Because, right in the middle of this great gospel promise, Zephaniah interrupts with our four verses. He breaks out with a song of praise to God. Can you hear how excited and overjoyed he was? Hear some of his words: "Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem!"

You know, I hear those words, and I can't help but think ahead to Christmas night, when another joyous song of praise was being sung. Do you know what I'm talking about? Shepherds in a field, near Bethlehem, just tending their sheep, when an angel of the Lord appeared right in front of them, sharing the wonderful news – a Savior, THE Savior was born!

And then, with that great news, a choir of angels appeared, singing the song the shepherds soon would be singing after they saw the Christ-child: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

There was good reason for Zephaniah to raise up that cry of praise. The Israelites, who deserved nothing good from God, but who instead deserved terrible punishment, who deserved to be destroyed by the Babylonians. And yet, God was going to deliver them. He was going to keep a remnant safe from harm and return them to their home

Now, is there good reason for us to sing those same words? Oh, of course there is! I mean, we aren't facing the physical enemies that the Israelites were, that we have to live each day in fear that some other nation is going to come and completely annihilate us.

No, those aren't the enemies we need to be delivered from. No, our enemies are even worse because sometimes we can't even see them. Sometimes they take the form of those who are near and dear to us. All the time these are enemies we can't defeat on our own. I'm talking about our spiritual enemies. I'm talking about the devil. I'm talking about the world we live in. I'm talking about our own flesh. I'm talking about sin.

We all know very well what it's like to face these enemies because they attack us every day. Every day you and I are bombarded by temptations to lie, not tell the truth, to harbor hatred in our hearts, to speak words that are damaging to others, words that are damaging to God.

Every day, you and I face that giant of an enemy, the world, society, which tries, and often succeeds, to get us to conform to their immoral way of life, which on the outside appears good and nice, but with one look at God's Word you know it's not.

And even if you shut yourself in solitary confinement, every day, you battle your own sinful nature, which knows you, knows your every weakness, knows which pet sins you like to commit, know how hard to work to push you past the brink of your defense.

And the devil, he's got a hand in every temptation because he wants us. He wants us to suffer with him in hell. He wants to rule over us for all eternity. It's a tough fight, and it's not like you and I aren't up to the challenge. We try to combat these enemies on our own, but you know what happens. These enemies bombard us, on every side, and as soon as we chop one down, there's another temptation there to take its place, and there's no end in sight.

And for those failures, at the day of the LORD, like Zephaniah warns, we ought to be afraid of God. We ought to be afraid of God's punishment for our inability to defend ourselves against sin and temptation. We ought to be afraid of God's punishment for our constant waving the white flag of surrender and allowing Satan and his evil forces to take us over.

And if you thought that the Israelites had it bad, that God punished their sinfulness by having their enemies beat up on them, we deserve an even worse punishment, that because we often give in to sin and Satan, we should go to be with Satan forever in hell.

Yet, listen to the words of Zephaniah's song of praise, "Be glad and rejoice...the LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy...On that day...Do not fear, O Zion, do not let your hands hang limp."

Do not let your hands hang limp. Neat picture language there. Do you see what the phrase is trying to convey? The middle of the fight, and your hands hang limp at your side. You, paralyzed with fear, discouraged by the fight, by the losing, giving up, no longer wanting to or being able to fight.

But that won't happen because the LORD has taken away our punishment. Do you know how? Our verses say he's mighty to save. Those words are used to describe a mighty warrior. That's what Jesus' resume says this week. He is our Warrior, mighty to save.

Just as a warrior fights to protect and to save, that's exactly what Jesus did for us. You see, for Jesus, the fight against Satan and his forces wasn't a David vs. Goliath kind of fight, like really it is for you and me against our spiritual enemies. It might have looked that way at first, with Jesus' lowly birth, his meager lifestyle, his humiliating death on a cross, but God knew all along he was going to win.

Zephaniah tells us about those great achievements of our Mighty Warrior Our mighty Warrior has taken away our punishment that we deserve, that we've earned by our sinful lives. He took it on himself. Isaiah tells us more about that fight: "he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Jesus' humiliating death was a victory for Jesus. It was his crushing blow to Satan because his death took away all our sins, forgave them all, replacing that sin with his righteousness, his perfection, his holiness. And his resurrection sealed that victory for us.

Our might Warrior has turned back our enemy. He pushed back the lines, and he continues to keep the forces of sin and Satan off our backs. He fights for us every day and he wins for us every day so never again will we need to fear harm from our spiritual enemies or punishment when we do let them beat us up.

And not only has our Might Warrior secured our victory over sin in this life and our victory over death for eternity. Our Mighty Warrior, the King of Israel, of heaven and earth, he is with us. You know, Zephaniah repeats that phrase in our verses, that Jesus is with us, so it has to be important to him. It's just as important to us, to know that our Savior is always by our side, kind of like our own personal bodyguard, protecting us, yes, sometimes from physical harm, but even better, constantly keeping Satan and his evil henchman away from us, keeping them from harming our souls.

And now comes the best part. Obviously, with such awesome things being done for us by our Savior, the Mighty Warrior who has saved us from sin, death, and the devil, we want to thank him. We want to praise him. We want to shout his amazing deeds and sing of his mighty acts for all to hear. We want to rejoice over him all our days, saving our greatest hymns of love and joy and thanks for him.

But if you look at the last verse of our text, can you see who's also doing the rejoicing? God is doing the rejoicing as well. We are the ones who should be filled with joy and singing, because we have the

privilege in Christ of living with our God for eternity. But the Lord is just as happy as we are. He is happy because the goal of his work of redemption – saving his elect, you and me – has been reached. He is happy because we belong to him, not to the devil. He is happy because we will one day join him to sing praises for all eternity!

You want to talk about heroes in your life, true warriors? Please don't leave out Jesus. He's the mightiest of them all. He's done what no one else could do, defeat every spiritual enemy. Because of him, our eternal punishment is no more. So we rejoice. We shout aloud. And we sing with the angels at Jesus' birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men, on whom his favor rests."

Jesus is our peace. God's favor rests on us. He delights in us. We rejoice in his amazing love. Amen.