God’s Voice Amidst the Calls for Reform October 18, 2020

*Zephaniah 3:9-20 Series: Is God Racist?*

Repentance is one step towards reformation. ― Lailah Gifty Akita

Intro: The necessity and frustration of reform.

1. Human reforms are never embraced thoroughly enough.
2. The greatest reform movement in Jewish history wasn’t enough.

1:1 *The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.*

1:2 *I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.*

1. There were still people with divided loyalties.

1:5 *those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens, those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom*

1. There were still people who ignored God.

1:6 *those who have turned back from following the LORD, who do not seek the LORD or inquire of him*

1. There were still people who lived in complacency.

1:12 *At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.’*

* Why would God send this message (v .2) at this time (v. 1)?
* Why would people bow down to the God of Israel and Milcom as well? What does that look like in our lives today?
* Why is complacency so troubling to God?
1. Human reforms never reach far enough.
2. God would confront the injustice of Philistia.

2:5 *The word of the LORD is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you …*

1. God would confront the injustice of Moab and Ammon.

2:9 *Moab shall become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles and salt pits ...*

1. God would confront the injustice of Cush.

2:12 *You also, O Cushites, shall be slain by my sword.*

1. God would confront the injustice of Assyria

2:13 *And he will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria …*

1. God would confront the injustice of Israel.

3:7 *I said, ‘Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then your dwelling would not be cut off …*

* Why would God tell the Israelites that He was going to judge the nations that surrounded them?
* Israel was conquered by Babylon less than 25 years after Josiah’s reforms. Was there any point to what he did?
1. Human reforms never go deep enough.
2. Only God can purify a person.

3:9 *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 …*

1. Only God can truly unify His people.

3:9 *and serve him with one accord*

NIV: “serve him shoulder to shoulder”

3:10 *From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering.*

1. Only God can take away our shame.

3:11 *On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me …*

* How are God’s ‘reforms’ different than the ones we pursue?
* Why does God have to purify people before they can call upon Him and serve Him?
* How should we think about efforts to reform our society or our church today?
1. Gather, seek and sing!
2. Gather to seek the Lord in humility and righteousness.

2:1-2 *Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, before the decree takes effect …*

2:3 *Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD.*

1. Wait for the Lord.

3:8 “*Therefore wait for me,” declares the LORD, “for the day when I rise up to seize the prey.”*

1. Be careful who you sing for.

3:14 *Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!*

* Why does God tell His people to “wait”? What does it mean to “wait” like this today?
* How can we sing (v. 14) after hearing such terrible news?
* What area of your life do you most need to apply humility, righteousness, waiting or rejoicing?

Study ahead: Next week, we’ll study Jeremiah 38:7-13; 39:15-18.

Notes