

Rejoice – Renew – Restore

Three strong ways to understand the work of God in the midst of his people

Emmanuel = God-with-us

Let's read Zephaniah 3: 14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 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. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak.

*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**.*

I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. 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. 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.*

(Zephaniah 3:14-20 ESV)

Rejoice

The main message for today is that God is active in human history.

There is no reason to fear. Our hope lies within the providence of a God whose purpose is to bring all things into a reconciling fellowship with him— motivated by the love envisioned in Yahweh’s covenant with Israel, fulfilled in the Word-made-flesh person of Jesus Christ, and brought to completion by the work of the Spirit in the hearts of all who believe!

God-with-us (God in our midst) is a source of trust and confidence, a well of salvation from which we “draw water” with joy!

Look at what Paul wrote to church at Philippi in Chapter 4: 4-7

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. **The Lord is at hand**; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

(Philippians 4:4-7 ESV)

Emmanuel = God-with-us

Do you remember what Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 18:20?

“Where are two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them”.

Do you remember what God said to Joshua after the death of Moses?

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”
(Joshua 1:9 ESV)

In a world of chaos, greed, deceit, empty promises, where the name of Jesus offends people, yet they use his name as a curse word, where Merry Christmas, the nativity and the bible is always under attack – **God is with us!**

In a world where sex is the biggest money maker and every other show on TV wants you to believe homosexuality is considered normal, Gay Pride day is alive and well in Home Depot, and be careful of what you call SIN or you might be labeled as a “hater” and bigot because you declare the word of God is truth – So don’t fear, Rejoice – to do again

In world where horrific acts violence is seen on the news, read about in the newspapers, and some right in your own hometown! Jesus says this in Matthew 24

For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

*“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and **you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.** And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because **lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.***

(Matthew 24:5-12 ESV)

Renew

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

(Romans 12:2 ESV)

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

(Matthew 11:28-30 ESV)

So what does it mean to be renewed?

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|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| ✓ To make like new | Restore |
| ✓ To make new spiritually | Regenerate |
| ✓ To restore to existence | Revive |
| ✓ To make extensive changes | Rebuild |

Turn with me in your bibles to Luke 3:7-18

*He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “**You brood of vipers!** Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now **the axe** is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into **the fire.**”*

And **the crowds** asked him, “What then shall we do?” And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” **Tax collectors** also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” **Soldiers** also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

As **the people** were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but **he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

(Luke 3:7-17 ESV)

The images are pitchfork, and axe, and fire (not an open fire for roasting chestnuts, either). Instead, repentance requires tough self-examination and a lifestyle change.

The alternative is a lazy Christianity that lacks integrity and refuses to be ruthless with sin—whether an attitude in the heart or an activity of the hands. Judgment is imminent; separation of the true from the false inevitable. (Matt 24:32, Rev 20:12, 15, Rev 21:8)

You can get ready for the coming of Jesus, but it requires transformed living—fruit worthy of repentance. Those who live under the reign of God must turn from their sin and start on the journey toward him with a life characterized by justice, mercy, kindness, integrity, and honesty.

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold the new has come. How sad, countless number of homes will celebrate Christmas but will leave Jesus outside looking in!

Restore

*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**.*

“He will rejoice over you with gladness,” the prophet announces, “he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing”

An earlier Church Father Theodoret of Cyr once said this:

“You see, in the Incarnation of our Savior, then it was he healed the oppressed in heart in the washing of regeneration, then it was that he renewed human nature, loving us so much as to give his life for us. After all “greater love than this no one can show than for one to lay down one’s life for one’s friend” and again “God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, so that everyone believing in him might not be lost but have eternal life”.

God is on the scene with a promise to restore and “bring you home”

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(Emmanuel: God-with-us).