“The Consequences of Disobedience”

Zephaniah 3:1-8       June 12, 2016

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Lesson Summary

Introduction:

In our day we hear so many messages about grace (and, we should) that we tend to forget there’s another side to the coin. It’s called consequences.

You may have heard me tell this story before, but it fits perfectly here and to me it’s worth repeating:

*In my elementary school when I was a kid, on one side of the chalkboard would be an area sectioned off titled “Consequences.” For those who were having behavior problems in class that day their name would be written under “Consequences” as a first warning. Following that, if problems persisted check marks would begin to appear next to the name. For each check received that individual was falling deeper and deeper into receiving some sort of additional “Consequence” (and yes, I keep capitalizing it on purpose 😊).*

*There are two paths in life one can choose to follow: God-seeking vs. self-seeking; obedience vs. disobedience. Where do we walk today? Disobedience brings consequences. No matter who you are or where you reside in life; no matter if you are a sinner or a saint; God’s people or not, there will be ramifications for choosing to walk opposite of the will of God.*
Throughout the generations men have been sent to instruct and warn God’s people about living a life that glorifies Him. God’s people, in today’s lesson, heard many warnings about their ungodly behavior via His mouthpieces, the prophets.

The “prophets” acted as a GPS would do in our vehicles and show the way to reach one’s destination, and one’s destination is to be in the will of God. Jeremiah 25:4 states, “And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined you ear to hear.” Whether one follows the instructions and positioning of God was another story. (God Punishes Sin/Word For Life Says)

God laid out for them the effect of their disobedient choices and Zephaniah was the chosen vessel of today’s lesson that would relay His message beginning with “Woe.”

Zephaniah 3:1-2 “Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city! She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God.”

“Woe” in the Bible usually points toward a time of distress or judgment (compare Isa. 10:1-4; Lam. 5:16; Mic. 2:1-3; Rev. 12:12). The prophecy against this city was grim unless there were a complete turnaround. This city is Jerusalem of whom the prophet speaks.

They no longer walk as God’s chosen people. Their city is described as being “filthy and polluted.” The fact of the matter is sin stains. It defiles and leaves one in a state of corruptness and not being able to fellowship with a holy God.

Please note: God wants holiness in our lives to nurture the relationship between He and us. I love a message that pronounces blessings just as much as the next person, but without holiness, it means absolutely nothing in His sight. As a whole we need to come back to the central theme of holiness because the LORD requires nothing less. I am not talking about rules and regulations, but rather hearts fully dedicated to Him because they recognize that He is the LORD.
That which is filthy and polluted will not be accepted.

“She obeyed not the voice.” They didn’t want to hear what God had to say. They refused to apply the words of prophesy to themselves and to take the shame for what they had done. They had no remorse; no guilt. The prophet’s words did not move the people to a place of repentance. Their hearts were too hardened and their necks were too stiffened to take heed to the forewarning of impending doom.

They didn’t want to hear that they were not right in the eyes of God. They didn’t want to hear words of rebuke that lets them know they have fallen short of the glory of God. They didn’t want to hear sound doctrine. Therefore, they refused to listen at all. They wanted their ears tickled with words of blessings and peace. Doom and gloom was not the type of prophet they wanted so they refused to hear and obey.

Please note: When Jesus delivered a message, often He would say, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,” (Matthew 11:15; see also Matthew 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8 and 14:35). There has to be a personal willingness to open oneself up to take in the message God is delivering through His chosen mouthpieces.

When one refuses to hear and obey they usually despise “correction” as well. The Bible tells us, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth,” (Hebrews 12:6; see also Proverbs 3:11, 12). Discipline grabs hold of the unruly side of man and ventures to steer him/her back on the right path. Yet, for all that, these people still refused to receive.

“She trusted not in the LORD; and she drew not near to her God.” Notice here the use of the feminine personal pronoun “her.” “She,” speaking of that city, had a relationship with “God” as her own. God is in a covenant relationship with His people yet they don’t trust in Him (who has never steered them wrong), nor do they seek a deeper connection with Him. They were too busy chasing the false ways and false gods of the land. But, James taught if you, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you . . .” (4:8). When you come close to God, God will come close to you, but those in this city were not seeking to do so.
Zephaniah 3:3-4 “Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.”

“Her princes were as roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves.” One thing both the “lions” and the “wolves” are known for is their ability to stalk their prey and devour, and those in position of leadership were described so heinously as they. Leaders, by definition, are people who are in authority to positively guide others. That’s why they are often referred to as shepherds in the Bible, for they have the responsibility of going before the people as Jesus did to direct the path of the flock (see John 10:4). But, these were corrupt individuals. This was also an issue Micah prophesied about against the leadership as well (see Micah 3:5-12).

“Her prophets are light and treacherous persons.” 2 Timothy tells us, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables,” (4:3-4). That was not only a thing that will happen in the future and has happened in the past – this is very much true in the day and age we are currently living in.

These prophets were considered “light” because their messages carried no meat. There was nothing hardy in it to save man from their wicked ways; to provoke the heart of the sinner back to repentance. They were the “ear ticklers” we hear so much about.

False prophets were full of lying words; they are “treacherous persons” who can’t be trusted to uphold the truth. Their deceptive words misled the people down the wrong path where false hope resides, causing them to place their confidence in that which will not stand the test of time. The irony in that is a prophet was supposed to be one whom you can count on, one who would rightly tell you what God had to say but it was these shifty characters Zephaniah prophesied against as well.
“Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.”
The “priests” are ordained by God to bring the people closer to Him. Through their service in the temple and on God’s behalf, they were to be carriers and protectors of that which is righteous and holy; an upholder of the “law.” Rather, they were defiled and defiled the “sanctuary” in the process.

When something is defiled and “polluted” it is beyond just being a little dirty; it is detestable and considered unclean. They have sinned greatly before God, in His sanctuary, and in all that they did (see God’s Glory Enters In/Word For Life Says for more details).

Zephaniah 3:5 “The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame.”

God is still there, present in the “midst” of His people. This was His city (Psalm 48:1-3; 46:4; 87:3; Daniel 9:16) and the place where He chose to put His name (2 Chronicles 6:6). This is a very crucial point. Because God, despite man’s attempts to outrun Him, sees all unrighteousness going on, all sin, and all transgressions (just ask Jonah). Nothing is hidden from His holiness and His righteousness. God sees it. Hebrews reminds us, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do,” (4:13).

So, why don’t they think that He will not judge the actions of this polluted city that doesn’t fall in line with His “just” ways? God is and knows only how to be “just” (righteous), Isaiah 30:18, and He expects the same from His people. His Word declares, “Be holy; for I am holy,” (1 Peter 1:16; see also Leviticus 20:7-8). They and we are called to honor God with lives well lived in holiness.

“Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face,” (Psalm 89:14). “He will not do iniquity.” God will always only does what is right according to His Word and His holy ordinances. Therefore, when “He bring his judgment to light, he faileth not,” there are no shortcomings when His holy gavel bangs.
All sin must be dealt with. A choice in disobedience DOES matter to God and disobedience brings about the consequences the Judge issues. Yet, and still, **“the unjust knoweth no shame.”** They continue life as if not caring, taking into consideration, or reviewing one’s life to see if they are living on the side of pleasing God or not. They don’t blush at their sin, rather they revel in it.

**Please note:** One does not have to be a resident of Jerusalem for God to be in the “midst” or see the sin and wrongs going on. His eyes are ever roaming the earth. “The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD’S throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men,” (Psalm 11:4).

**Zephaniah 3:6-7** “I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.”

God has dealt with the sins of people before and He will surely do it again. Using a similar phrase as last week’s lesson, here He says, **“I have cut off nations.”** Although we are not given any specifics here, any nation or people that stand in a constant state of rebellion against God, God have brought them to destruction.

Case in point, remember the overthrowing and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19)? Their sin was so great God dealt with it via utter devastation. In Zephaniah 2:9 it is prophesied that Moab and the children of Ammon shall be as those two. Other nations and cities are receiving their prophesied doom as well in Zephaniah 2 due to their rebellious ways. God’s desire is for people to learn the lessons of the past to avoid the judgment of the future. History can be one of our greatest teachers and preparers against what is to come.

The city of Judah would be wise to heed these familiar stories and listen to the words of the prophet’s warnings. Surely, knowing the power of the past the hearts of the people would turn to a better future with God; that they would **“fear me,” (revere Me, love Me, and follow Me)** the prophet spoke on God’s
behalf; that their city would avoid the devastation and punishment of those and “not be cut off.”

There is the promise from 2 Chronicles 7:14 which declares, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” God wants to spiritually heal people from their sin sick ways. God wants to restore. It doesn’t have to come to a destructive end.

But, this was not to be so. Rather, our lesson tells us, “they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.”

Zephaniah 3:8 “Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.”

God is not playing with people! He will judge rightly and punish all sin and rebellion. It’s coming, as last week’s lesson stated. God will have His day now and in the future. As sand drips through an hourglass, we come closer to that day when God will require that justice be served for the unrepentant.

Marianne Williamson says: “God created the law of free will, and God created the law of cause and effect. And he himself will not violate the law. We need to be thinking less in terms of what God did and more in terms of whether or not we are following those laws,” (Quote Source: Thinkexist.com). And, if not, the consequences will surely come.

The language used above may seem harsh to some: “rise up to the prey . . . pour out mine indignation . . . fierce anger . . . fire of my jealousy.” But, remember these words are directed to those who through disobedience have opposed God and His holy standards. God still loves. He is still wonderful. But, He is also just, righteous, and holy and will follow through with judgement.

Conclusion:
Many in Zephaniah’s day would not heed the call to repent and return to God. May each of us consider and answer that call today.