

CFAMC DEVOTIONAL PAGE
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The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing. –Zephaniah 3:17

For Easter, my wife and I bought our twin preschoolers a wonderful book, *Really Woolly Bedtime Prayers*, by Bonnie Rickner Jensen. This book (in part) quotes the above verse in a section titled “The Shepherd Sings.” To be honest, I had forgotten about this verse, and was taken somewhat by surprise when I read it.

Because this is my first Devotional for the Christian Fellowship of Art *Music Composers*, I was eager to discuss a Scripture pertaining to music. Most of the Psalms, of course, invite us to sing about and/or to God:

Sing to God, sing praises to His name; Lift up a song for Him who rides through the deserts, Whose name is the Lord, and exult before Him. –Psalm 68:4

Sing for joy to God our strength; Shout joyfully to the God of Jacob. Raise a song, strike the timbrel, The sweet sounding lyre with the harp. –Psalm 81:1-2

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High: To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night, Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound. --Psalm 92:1-3

Variations on a theme. After perusing Psalm after Psalm in which we are to sing to God—sometimes a cappella, sometimes with instruments, but always joyfully—it is somewhat startling to read Zephaniah 3:17, which tells us that God will rejoice over us with singing. Matthew 26:30 says that Jesus sang hymns *with us*—to God—on the night before He died for our sins. But *God* sings with joy over *us*?

By itself, Zephaniah 3:17 is so joyful that we should read what comes before it:

*Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled! She obeys no one, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord, she does not draw near to her God.
–Zeph. 3:1-2*

I said to the city, Surely you will fear me and accept correction! Then her dwelling would not be cut off, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did. Therefore wait for me, declares the Lord, for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger. –Zeph. 3:7-8

“The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger.” How did we get from there to “he will rejoice over you with singing?”

On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the Lord. –Zeph. 3:9-12

In verse 14, we return to a familiar theme:

Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. –Zeph. 3:14-15

“The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy.”

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. –John 3:16

“God so loved the world.” The love that led God to give Jesus for us is the same love that leads him to rejoice over us with singing. I suggest that it is possible to read Zephaniah as a prediction of the gift of Easter. I also suggest that Zephaniah articulates two duties for us as Christian composers: first, to “sing for joy to God,” as so many of the Psalms (and other Scriptures) instruct. Second, with God’s help, to let our audiences hear the songs that God is singing with joy over us.

In “The Shepherd Sings,” Bonnie Rickner Jensen writes: “Dear God, thank You for singing a joyful song over me.” To Ms. Jensen’s thanksgiving, I add this: thank you for giving us the gift of music composition. Let us neither waste this gift nor use it in ways that are rebellious and defiled, but help us use it to amplify the songs You are singing over us, and to sing joyfully to You.