

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

Week beginning Sunday 16 December 2018 Singers of a new song

Pray that we would be open to God opening our eyes to the future so that we might have hope to enable him to work in us and through us in our present and that that might have an impact upon those around us – giving them a flavour of what is to come in their midst.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Zephaniah 3:14-20

Background There are familiar themes common with many of the other prophets: A day of doom and destruction is threatened, when Judah will be punished for her worship of other gods. The Lord will punish other nations also. Although Jerusalem is doomed, in time the city will be restored, with a humble and righteous people living there. Our passage today homes in on the final, rather more positive, aspects of Zephaniah's message. A song of joy and celebration at the prospect of restoration of God's people – including fellowship with God. Without losing sight of the challenges even rebuke can we be encouraged to move from our waywardness towards this glorious future?

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Doom and gloom, church in terminal decline, nothing but negatives. How can we take seriously the note of challenge and rebuke without it crushing the life and hope out of us? How can we make an honest appraisal of how things are a) in the church b) in our society? How can we ensure that we allow God to really have his say on these things? Why is "God will be with us and everything will be alright" maybe not the whole story?
2. How do we face up to our responsibilities in regard to where the Church is at? Looking after the congregation and keeping things going is necessary but is it enough? Jesus always set his disciples to face outwards to those who as yet were not part of their group. How should we change the emphasis so that it is more as Jesus intends? (Be as practical as you can be!) What may need to give so that we can address Jesus' priorities?
3. How can song be a help in a) helping us attune to God's ways? b) God's plans for the future? How can singing help lift our spirits generally and esp our faith, hope, trust in God and his plans for the future? We can sing on our own, but often we sing together. How does that help? Give any examples of how song has encouraged you in your faith, in outreach, with a vision for the future?
4. There is a balance to be struck between looking after the spiritual well being of believers and reaching out to others who don't (YET?) see faith as important. Unless we are reasonably spiritual healthy we aren't likely to be able to very effective in mission. Yet, if we are always bemoaning our (spiritual) health we'll may put off mission indefinitely. Discuss the ways forward. What first steps can we take?
5. Talk of the end of time or the end of our time can be scary. Why does Jesus not want us to be too down about this? Without wishing our lives away or taking anything from the sadness we experience at the loss of a loved one how may a healthier understanding of heaven and God's future for us help us to live more fulfilled (and enjoyable) lives now?
6. Please discuss/consider anything else that arises from the passage or service.

Prayer Sing a new song to the Lord. Lord you are doing new things in our lives and in our world. Help us to be willing to see the positives in the way you are working, to get behind it where we can and to encourage others. Help us to be willing to sing a new song – to allow the joy, peace and hope of the good news of our Saviour to percolate through our lives and have a positive impact on those round about us. Amen.