



**Call to worship** For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory. (Psalm 149:4)

**Hymn StF 367** When I was lost, you came and rescued me ; reached down into the pit and lifted me.  
O Lord, such love, I was as far from you as I could be.  
You know all the things I've ever done,  
but Jesus' blood has cancelled every one.  
O Lord, such grace to qualify me as your own.

*There is a new song in my mouth,  
there is a deep cry in my heart,  
a hymn of praise to Almighty God — hallelujah !  
And now I stand firm on this Rock,  
my life is hidden now with Christ in God.*

*The old has gone and the new has come  
— hallelujah ! Your love has lifted me.*

Now I have come into your family  
for the Son of God has died for me.  
O Lord, such peace,  
I am as loved by you as I could be.  
In the full assurance of your love,  
now with every confidence we come.

**O Lord, such joy  
to know that you delight in us.**

*Kate Simmonds and Miles Simmonds*

**Prayer** Father we are thankful that we can offer our praise and thanks to you, and we come now to do that but our minds are blown by the fact you delight in us, that you sing a love song over us. We who have so often turned our backs on you, so often hurt you and we come now and say sorry. Just our simple turning to you brings you delight. You sent your own Son to take the punishment we deserve. We are learning the truth that your love will never let us go. May we know your love song over us has our name on it. Thank you heavenly Father for such love and grace. Amen

**Reading Zephaniah 3: 14-20 God delights in us and sings over us**

**Reflection God sings over us!**

What images of God do you have? A Father with children. A potter moulding his clay. A judge on his throne. He is a God who loves singing,, Is he also a Singer himself? There is a lot in scripture about people singing praises to God. Pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem at festival time sang. The Psalms were written as songs. Some of the pictures of heaven, are of multitudes around the throne singing. But I have never thought of God as singing – until I read this verse from Zephaniah

*The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing. (Zephaniah 3v17).* God singing over us his children

That's a verse worth pondering on and we'll look at the 5 Phrases of this verse. But first we must remind ourselves on the context. Many of the prophets are full of doom and gloom and Zephaniah is talking about the judgement of God on the people of Judah, The people have turned their back on the Lord and judgement is coming. It is only just the last few verses where Zephaniah offer some hope and the good news of the gospel.

**First Phrase: The Lord your God is with you,** We have recently celebrated Christmas where Jesus is called Emmanuel – God with us. Jesus born in Bethlehem as the Saviour of the world is God becoming flesh and dwelling amongst us King Solomon when he was dedicating the temple he had built for the Lord asked the question “Will God really dwell on earth with humans?” 2 Chon 6 18. Solomon asked, if his prayer and the prayers of people offered in that temple would be heard by God – that God would see people turning back to himself. They believed God was there in the Holy of holies. But the answer to Solomons question was fulfilled more accurately in the coming of Jesus -It's a definite Yes -Jesus comes and dwells among us and as John says we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, full of grace and truth.

**The second phrase the Mighty Warrior who saves.** Or He is mighty to save Here Zephaniah becomes prophetic – the mighty saviour is clearly pointing to Jesus, the one who will save us from the judgement and punishment we deserve. Dear old Simeon, holding the baby Jesus in the temple says “For my eyes have seen your salvation” – still just a baby, but the one who would become the Mighty warrior bringing salvation to the world. As the mighty warrior defeating Satan

**The third phrase He will take great delight in you;** Or “He will rejoice over you with joy;” Just think on that for a moment. He – that is the Lord your God – takes great delight in you. And who does he take great delight in? Not

simply the rich and the powerful and the influential. It is not only the kings and queens, the presidents and prime ministers that God delights in. He takes great delight in *you*. He knows every facet of your life. And he takes great delight in you. God doesn't wait for us to be perfect before he loves us, God loves us while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8)

**The fourth phrase *in his love he will no longer rebuke you*, or amplified version "He will rest [in silent satisfaction] and in His love He will be silent and make no mention [of past sins, or even recall them]; Remember the context – the people of Judah have turned from God – Judgment is pending. But we have a God who has a plan of salvation. What is our picture of God? Is He a God who *loves tepidly* but *punishes earnestly*, or a God who *punishes reluctantly* but *loves tenaciously*? We have a God who loves us so much that he is very reluctant to punish**

How do we respond to a God who is silent in his accusations against us because he himself has taken the punishment due to us through his Son. Zephaniah has already hinted at that in Zeph 1: <sup>7</sup> Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. I would be very tempted to start defending myself against the accusation and say BUT, digging a hole for ourselves. Much better for us to be silent and listen for God's response

**He is a God who is with us, who provides the way of salvation, who doesn't prosecute the case against us, but instead the final fifth phrase of the text says "*but will rejoice over you with singing*".**

He has written a song with your name on it, he know exactly when you have turned your back on him, yet he has already in Jesus had the punishment for that sinful episode cleansed from your record – he keeps no record of past sins. – Don't list all your excuses for going astray, don't argue your case – be silent and listen for God's song over you

In a wonderful insight, Zephaniah put paid to any idea that God is half hearted about me or his people. He doesn't just put up with me grudgingly, grumbling about me as never-quite-good-enough. He is still passionate about all of his creation, and that includes me and it includes you too: we are his crowning glory, made in his image.

Doesn't that make you want to join in God's dance of joy? Whatever regrets or shame we carry, God's promise is to turn it into praise and renown in all the earth. **God sings a song of delight over us Amen**

### For your reflection.

- 1) What does it mean for you that you are made in God's image and God delights in you?
- 2) What is your response to a God who loves you so much He doesn't want to let you go?.

### Prayers

Loving God, we are thankful that you take delight in the whole of your creation, and the amazing truth that we are created in your image. We pray for those whose lives have been damaged by abuse, neglect, by war and famine, who don't recognise you as Father, who have a poor self image. May they discover your transforming love and receive healing in their broken lives.

#### **Reach out in love and put a song of joy into their hearts.**

We pray for those who lives are filled with pain, those wrestling with chronic disease, those coming to terms

with disabling injury, those battling against terminal illness. May they discover a relationship with you, and know a peace and strength in your presence

#### **Reach out in love and put a song of joy into their hearts.**

We pray for those who have lost hope, overwhelmed with life. May everyone for whom life is hard know you had upon, confident that night will give way to dawn.

#### **Reach out in love and put a song of joy into their hearts. Amen.**

**Hymn StF 481** The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want ;  
he makes me lie in pastures green,  
he leads me by the still, still waters,  
his goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone,  
and I will trust in you alone,  
for your endless mercy follows me,  
your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,  
and he anoints my head with oil ;  
and my cup — it overflows with joy,  
**I feast on his pure delights.**

And though I walk the darkest path —  
I will not fear the evil one,  
for you are with me, and your rod and staff  
are the comfort I need to know.

*Stuart Townend (b. 1963)*

**Blessing** Father God, thank you that you delight in us, thank you that you sing a song over us, thank you that your Son Jesus has opened all this for us. May we rest in the assurance that you watch over us and will never let us go. The Blessing of Father Son and Holy Spirit be upon you this day and for eternity. Amen