

Zephaniah 3:14-20  
“Jesus Reverses the Curses”  
Third Sunday in Advent

December 16, 2018  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Vicar Otterman

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

**[Introduction: Our Curse]**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. The world is filled with weary people. I’ve seen them in school, at work, driving down the street, and out grocery shopping. They have a look in their eyes that says, “What’s the point?”

We face a life that is filled with uncertainties. Every day people all over the planet are diagnosed with diseases like cancer. Others are trying to reassess their lives after losing their jobs, or because their marriage is dissolving before their eyes.

Confronted with these realities, it’s no wonder that people are searching for comfort and security. The world advertises many different ways to protect ourselves from these threats, whether it be through money, another person, or a career.

In the Christmas program, the janitor Henry Olson buys into the idea that he needs more money to find happiness in his life. He is desperate to acquire the peace that he thinks wealth will give him.

But even if we spend our lives trying to obtain one thing or another, it doesn’t ever truly give us the stability we yearn for. Our bodies decay, and eventually, no matter how much we fight it, we will die, and none of the things we’ve acquired will matter to us anymore.

At times it feels like we’ve been cursed to live a futile life. It feels like that, because it’s true. In Genesis, God warns Adam that if he eats from the forbidden tree, he will surely die, and after he and Eve disobey God’s commandment and fall into sin, God pronounces a series of curses upon them as a result of their disobedience. At the end of the curses, God says, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (**Genesis 3:19**)

Because of Adam and Eve’s sin, all of their descendants, including you and I, are enslaved to sin. And because we too are guilty of sin, we are born under this curse

to struggle in pain and toil only to die and lose whatever happiness we may have had in this life.

### **[*Judah's Curse*]**

At the time of the prophet Zephaniah's ministry, Judah received an additional curse because of its disobedience to God. Judah spent years making alliances with foreign nations and worshipping their idols.

They did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so in His holiness, God cursed them saying, "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth... I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem." (*Zephaniah 1:2, 4*)

This curse would eventually take the form of a Babylonian army laying waste to Jerusalem and the temple and taking the people of Judah away into captivity.

### **[*God Promises to Reverse the Curse*]**

Thankfully, God does not leave his people in the power of these curses. In both Genesis and Zephaniah, God promises to send someone who will reverse the curse and bring peace and stability to His people. That person whom God sent is His own beloved Son, Jesus, who became God in the flesh to defeat the power of sin and death and to free us from our curses.

### **[*Fortunes Restored*]**

After the prophet Zephaniah delivered God's oracles of judgement against Judah and Jerusalem, He gave another prophesy. Except this prophesy is not one of death but of life. He says:

"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." (*Zephaniah 3:14-15*)

God continues to tell Judah that in the future He will come amongst them as a mighty one who will save them. On that day, he will deal with their oppressors. He

will “gather the outcast,” and He will “change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.” He will restore their fortunes before their eyes. (**3:19-20**)

In Jesus, we see God in the midst of His people more closely than ever before. In His ministry, Jesus gathered the outcasts to Himself. He healed the sick and raised the dead. He forgave the sins of prostitutes and tax collectors.

And on the cross, Jesus defeated Judah’s worst enemies of all: sin, death and the devil. Without the threat of death and damnation, the peace of Christ abounds in His people. In Him God’s people can rejoice, because their fortunes are restored before their eyes.

### ***[The Curse is Broken]***

Even earlier in Genesis, God promised to send Jesus to destroy the original curse put on Adam and Eve. He told the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (**Genesis 3:15**)

This verse, which is often called “The First Gospel,” points to God’s promise that he would one day send the savior.

Jesus’ work on the cross didn’t just break the curse on the people of Judah. He broke our curse as well, the one that has plagued every generation of humanity.

We still work and endure in the reality of a sinful world, but instead of relying on our jobs, or spouse, or health to give us security, our treasures are stored in heaven, where no earthly threat can destroy the life we have in Jesus. Even though we will die, our lives will not end.

One day, Jesus will come again and raise us up to new life, completely free from the corruption of sin and death. Every trace of the curse will be gone forever, and we will live in peace with God and one another.

In the Christmas program, Mr. Olson is given a grace filled gift, and he sees a glimpse of a kingdom in which the curse had been lifted, which changes his life forever. God sends us as His church to bring the reality of His kingdom to people here and now, to bless them and to point them to the peace we have in Jesus.

### ***[Conclusion: Our Peace]***

This Advent season, we remember how God saved us from a pointless and futile life by sending His Son, Jesus to be born as one of us, so that He could take the punishment for our sins and break the curse of death. In him alone do we find our peace and security, because He promised us that one day He will return to raise us from the grave, to give us new glorious bodies, and to rule over us and be in our midst for all eternity.

So rejoice! Jesus has come and is coming again. Our Lord is at hand, so find your rest in the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. Amen.

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“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

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