

“Our Rejoicing God”

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All verses NKJV

Perhaps the most common image that Christians have of God is one in which He is sitting on a throne, surrounded by myriads of angels, who are worshipping Him day and night. Since God is holy and infinitely greater than all of His creation, that depiction of God is accurate. However, if this is the only concept of God that we have, it is a bit deficient. Ask yourself if you can you picture God rejoicing and singing. That vision may not be so easy to imagine. But the prophet Zephaniah saw it and spoke of it:

Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing.

Let us examine this verse a little closer from a devotional perspective so that its deep truths can take root in our lives.

“The LORD your GOD in your midst”

I believe that the single greatest reality in the Christian life is not that we are going to heaven someday (as awesome as that is!); it is that God is present with us *now and for all eternity*. He is and always will be in our midst. Eternal life with God does not begin at death - it begins at the new birth (John 3:3).

The Hebrew word used here for “midst” is *qereb*, and it means “the nearest part, the center.” The truth that this word presents is that He is extremely close to us, even occupying the very center of our existence. We know from other Scriptures that He resides in us by His Spirit¹ and He covers us with His presence². Knowing – *really knowing* – that God is always present with us will provide peace in the torrential storms that life may bring.

Not only is He present with us, but:

“The Mighty One, will save”

When we focus on His presence while reading, praying, or while in contemplation, we will feel the most protected and secure.

In the Psalms we read about God intervening when enemies attacked His people, either by giving them the strength to fight or by accomplishing a victory on their behalf. In the historical books we see God rescue His people in the midst of battles against overwhelming odds and defeat the foes that trouble them. Meditating on those passages will cultivate in us an assurance that since God also loves us, He will strengthen us for and rescue us in the battles we face. What an awesome, loving God, we serve!

On a few occasions when God’s presence was almost tangible to me (in worship or intense quiet time), I’ve *felt* as if nothing in the universe could harm me. I have concluded that when we spend time in the presence of our awesome God, nothing that this world can do to us matters. He is our source of peace even if we venture into “the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4).

Recently while in quiet prayer, I saw in my mind the Lord hugging me. What made this experience unique is that in my spirit I could literally ‘feel’ His embrace. His hug was strong and I became teary-eyed during those few moments. I have not had this experience again so I cannot say it is normative for a Christian. But I believe God will always find a way to express His tender love to us. Why not spend some time with Him today and ask Him to reveal His love *to you?*

“He will rejoice over you with gladness”

The idea of God *rejoicing* over us may be surprising to some. We know that God loves us, but does He really rejoice over us? Isn't God just sitting on a throne somewhere, stoically reigning over His creation? Is God really emotional?

It may sound irreverent, but Habakkuk said that the Mighty One “will rejoice over [His people].” What causes God to rejoice and sing? His people! His joy over us is so profound that He is pictured as rejoicing and singing. Is this not comparable to a human parent with their children?

If the angels in heaven can express joy when one sinner repents³, how much more can God exuberantly respond when one of His wayward children comes home⁴, or when His people yearn for His loving embrace? May we never forget that Almighty God, worthy of all of our worship, honor, and reverence, is also our loving Father. He longs to convey that to us while we engage in this earthly pilgrimage.

“He will quiet you with His love”

The love that He expresses to us brings rest and quiet to our noisy souls. Despite the circumstances that we have to navigate through in life, God's quieting love is available to bring us a peace that “surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

How can we experience God's quieting love?

- Spend time with Him in quiet and solitude.
- Engage in heart born worship.
- Converse with Him throughout the day.

These are a few of the activities we can practice and by which we will find ourselves quieted in God's peaceful presence.

“He will rejoice over you with singing”

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of God in Zephaniah 3:17 is that God rejoices over us with “singing”. This Hebrew word can also be translated as “loud singing, shouting in triumph.” Even if the prophet who wrote these words was speaking metaphorically or attributing a creaturely activity⁵ to God, the fact is that God is so joyful with us being His children (purchased through the triumphal work of Jesus on the cross) that He sings over us! More words can never do justice to this amazing depiction of His love for us.

Therefore, the next time you feel like no one loves you or you struggle with life’s burdens, just remember that Almighty God rejoices with eternal love for you and He is waiting to embrace you. Allow Him to.

¹ Colossians 1:27 - “Christ in you, the hope of glory”.

² E.g., Psalm 91:4.

³ Luke 15:7, 10.

⁴ See Luke 15:11-32.

⁵ Angels and angelic-like creatures sing: e.g., Revelation 5:8-9.