

What does it mean that God will rejoice over us with singing **(Zephaniah 3:17)**

Zephaniah 3:17 includes an interesting description of God singing over people: “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.”

Two important observations regarding this passage: first, singing represents God’s joy. The Hebrew phrase translated “he will rejoice over you with singing” can also be translated literally as “he rejoices over you with a shout of joy.”

Second, God’s singing parallels the singing of His people in Jerusalem. “Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion!” (verse 14). This unit of poetry begins with the people of Jerusalem singing praise to God and ends with God singing over His people. God rejoices with His people, and He expresses joy when His people praise Him.

The question then is, why is God so joyful? This passage of Zephaniah speaks of a future time when God has ended His judgment upon Israel. All of their enemies have been destroyed, and Israel is entering a time of safety and blessing (verses 8, 15, 19). Zephaniah is speaking of the future millennial kingdom when the Messiah (Jesus) will reign with His people in Jerusalem (Isaiah 9:7; Revelation 20:1–6).

The word picture in Zephaniah 3:17 is full of emotion. God the Father is the One who holds His daughter Jerusalem and sings joyfully in her presence. Just as a loving parent cradles a child and sings out of love, so God’s song over His people is born of His great love. After a time of hardship, our loving Lord dries His people’s tears, comforts their hearts, and welcomes them to a new world.

Finally, Jesus also taught in the New Testament that “there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). Whether or not God Himself sings in this passage is not made clear, but it is clear there is rejoicing in God’s presence when those who are lost repent and are made right with God (Ephesians 2:8–9; John 3:16).

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BY CHUCK LAWLESS

Worship is not only about what we do when the church gathers; it is what we are to do every day. The best worship is a continuum of: worshiping God by getting ready to meet Him; worshiping Him with His people through His Word and His Spirit; and worshiping Him by being obedient to His Word. Here are 10 questions to ask yourself today prior to gathering with other believers this weekend:

1. **Do I really expect to encounter God in worship?** If you do, that will change the way you live today. When God encounters holy people; He purifies them; when He encounters unholy people, though, He sometimes consumes them.
2. **Will my sin hinder the work of God’s Spirit in our congregation?** God is, of course, sovereign, but He often chooses not to work through unrepentant people. Even Jesus’ work in Nazareth was limited because the people did not believe (Mark 6:5).
3. **Will my prayers at church be the first time I’ve genuinely focused on prayer this week?** If so, God may need to break through your self-dependence simply to bring your heart to the beginning of worship.
4. **Is there anyone I hope I won’t see at church this weekend?** Be honest—is there anybody with whom you’re having conflict? anyone you hope to avoid at church?
5. **Might anyone I know be attending with us this weekend because I’ve invited him or her?** This answer is easy – though not good – if you haven’t invited anyone to attend. If you have invited someone, pray for that person now.
6. **Will I give sacrificially to support God’s work?** Giving dollars is one way to give, but not the only way. Will you give your money and your talents/abilities in worship? I encourage believers to give to God “until it hurts.” Nothing we give will compare to what God has given us.
7. **Am I planning to listen to the preaching?** Sometimes we struggle with the preaching. Our reasons vary, but the result is the same: we don’t really listen. If you’re already planning on not listening, you’re likely going to miss something God has for you.
8. **Have I prayed for the one who will proclaim the Word?** It’s possible to answer #3 above properly, but miss this one. We leave our pastors uncovered in the spiritual battle if we haven’t prayed for them before they preach. And, you don’t have much right to #7 above if you haven’t interceded for your pastor.
9. **If God unexpectedly moves in my life in a powerful way, will I say, “Not my will, but yours be done”?** God has been known to interrupt our plans, redirect our dreams, change our callings – and even move our locations. Worship is most genuine when the worshiper first lays himself or herself on the altar.
10. **If I’m honest, am I assuming that nothing will change in my life after worship this weekend?** I fear too many of us would answer “yes” to this question. May God change our heart if that’s the case.

What other questions would you add?