

NO HOPE, NO FUTURE?

“I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. (Zephaniah 1:3, ESV)

CLIMB INTO YOUR OWN HEAD FOR A MINUTE. Do what they call the metacognition—the thinking about your thinking. What are the moments on the first tee like for you? Do you normally anticipate a good round of golf? Or are you more likely to expect impending disaster?

We might call this the difference between optimism and pessimism. Or we might say it’s a matter of knowing how prepared one is to face the task at hand.

If you’ve been hanging around people who call themselves Christians in the 21st Century, you’ve surely heard a good number of them lay claim to Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” It’s a most promising verse! But it leads to a critical question that too many are forgetting to ask: *Is this promise meant for me?*

There is more theological entanglement than you might imagine in the answer to that rather simple question. I’ll spare you.

What I do want to ask, with only a note of facetiousness, is why no one is latching on to Zephaniah 1:3. Actually, it is not fair to pick on Zephaniah alone. As the prophets delivered the words of God, nearly all of them had bad news to bring alongside the good. Jesus included. And for many people, that’s the hard part. How could the Savior of the world, who came in love, also paint verbal pictures of burning hell and declare to the cleanest living of all religionists, “Woe to you!”?

Jesus did this, we know, not just so he could fall in line with the prophets. He did this because he bore the knowledge of God. And upheld in that knowledge are both wonders and warnings.

So here’s a simple rule to help you answer the simple question: Heed the warnings and you’ll reap the wonders. Know that the same God who has established severe consequences has provided eternal escape. He most certainly does want to give you a future and a hope, but in order to receive these you must forsake the unbelief that leads to doom. You must be prepared to face the judgment.

Opening questions So fess up: what is your typical expectation on the first tee? • Are you someone who tends to gravitate more toward wonders or warnings in the way you assess life and its circumstances?

READING Zephaniah 1:17-2:3; Hebrews 9:27-28; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Heeding the warnings (Zephaniah 1-2)

What are the warnings of the prophet at the end of chapter 1, and to whom are they directed? From chapter 2, how might we instead prepare for the coming days of judgment and consequence?

Our salvation (Hebrews 9)

What occurs after we die? What is our one defense against the eternal consequences of sin?

Attributes of readiness (1 Thessalonians 5)

Why did Paul encourage readiness among the believers? What are some of the attributes of this readiness as he taught the Thessalonians?

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