Advent 2024

Week 3 The Curse will be Broken

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# Production Notes:

* Green highlighted text on the screen.
* Band comes up.

# Next Steps Cards:

Pull your next steps card out. Let’s pray that God speaks to us today. You can keep this for personal notes or turn it in at the end of the service. **Throughout the next service acknowledge it.**

# Opening Illustration:

Today, I want to speak to those who are striving to honor the Lord but find the journey difficult—maybe even like an ongoing battle.

Do you know the Christmas carol “Joy to the World?” Listen to the third verse:

'No more let sins and sorrows grow,

Nor thorns infest the ground;

He comes to make His blessings flow,

Far as the curse is found.'

This powerful hymn echoes the promises in Scripture: Christ came to break the curse of sin. His work begins in our hearts (Galatians 3:13), extends through the hands of His Church (2 Corinthians 5:18–20), and will one day restore all creation (Revelation 21:1–5).

But we’re not there yet. We still live in a world groaning under the effects of the curse (Romans 8:20–22). This brokenness often feels like a battle—whether through dilemmas that hold us back, snares that tempt us, or burdens that weigh us down.

Let’s explore how God’s redemptive work meets us in these struggles and how we can persevere with hope."

I should pause and clarify; Jesus did come and begin the breaking of the curse.

Concerning curse breaking in the world, think heart, hands and land. God's full redemption unfolds in three stages: heart (Jesus’ work on the cross, Galatians 3:13), hands (the Church’s mission in the world, 2 Corinthians 5:18–20), and land (the renewal of all things at the eschaton, Revelation 21:1–5). Jesus’ victory has inaugurated the process that is being played out. Heart, hands, land.

We still live in a world affected by the curse.

What do we mean by a 'cursed world'?

Biblically, a curse often reflects God's justice by allowing people to have the consequences of sin. It can involve God stepping back and letting their chosen idols take over, as seen in Romans 1:24–25.

Why does a cursed world hurt?

Those who reject God often say, "If God were good, He wouldn’t allow suffering." But God reminds us, "You were made for me, not just my creation. Separation from me leads to deeper suffering because it opposes true wholeness." Hell is not just the absence of God but the ultimate reality of rejecting a loving relationship with Him. (Acts 17:28; Col. 1:16; Rom. 6:23; 2 Thes. 1:9)

How do those who love God with redeemed hearts still feel the curse?

Let me explain it with three examples:

With each of these if it resonates with you take a moment and write it down on the next steps card.

1. The diabolical dilemmas.
   1. Use the metaphor of a man being called to go on a journey. As he comes to a great chasm he sees a bridge. As he begins to cross over the bridge he notices another man standing on the side of the bridge with a rope around his waist. He hands you the other side of the rope and jumps. You pull on the rope hard and prevent him from plummeting to his death. You don't have enough strength to pull him up but you can keep him from falling. You can't precede without going against the good you know in your heart.
   2. If this is you, write it down.
   3. Remember Joy to the World?   
      Far as the curse is found,

Far as the curse is found,

Far as, far as the curse is found."

1. The sinister snares.
   1. Awhile back I was talking with a young man about purity. The way he worded it was a bit funny. "Pastor Mike, I know this sounds crazy but it feels like lust is hunting me down. I drive down the road and ‘bam’ there is a sensual billboard. I open social media and ‘bam’ there is a sensual ad. I walk through the mall, go to the beach, you name it. Even when I am not searching, it feels like something is searching for me. It's like the world is working against my purity."
   2. If this is you, write it down.
   3. Remember Joy to the World?   
      Far as the curse is found,

Far as the curse is found,

Far as, far as the curse is found."

1. The backpack of burdens.
   1. I decided to run the other day with my 20lb vest. I was blown away with the increased difficulty. Just 20 pounds can change everything. Some of you carry weight that makes everything more difficult. A chronic illness, financial hardship, even a tendency toward a specific addiction.
   2. If this is you, write it down.
   3. Remember Joy to the World?   
      Far as the curse is found,

Far as the curse is found,

Far as, far as the curse is found."

Lectio:

**The History:**

It’s about 625 BC. Zephaniah opens his prophecy by a reversal of Genesis 1. The world has become undone because of human pride and lust for power. Glorious life is created when God leans in, death and suffering happen when God leans out. He longs for the curse to be broken.

* King Josiah's arrogance led the Hebrew people head long into a Babylon defeat. Babylon is portrayed as this evil dragon God will allow to gobble up the violent world of the Philistines, Moabites, Assyrians, Ammonites and even those in Jerusalem who have hearts filled with pride and power.

**Zephaniah 3:14-20 (ESV):**

"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. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: 'Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.' I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the Lord."[[1]](#footnote-2)

# Medatatio:

Even as God allows the evil world to consume itself, there will be a remnant of people God will preserve. Zeph. 2:1-3.

* The curse is first broken in our hearts before it is broken in our lands. "The Lord your God is in your midst" (v. 17): The Hebrew phrase "בְּקִרְבֵּךְ" (bekirbecha) suggests intimate closeness. "He will quiet you by his love" (v. 17): The Hebrew verb "יַּחֲרִישׁ" (yacharish) can also mean "to renew," indicating both God's personal presence, peace and inner care.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Like so many Old Testament prophets Zephaniah has a vision of what the world will be like when God finally breaks the curse. It begins with Christ and in the human heart, but one day every blade of grass will be made right too.

Actio: (Band comes up.)

What does this mean for us?

I see you. God sees you. This life is hard.

* Let me begin by simply saying… I see you. I see how hard it is to honor God. I see all the snares and terrible dilemmas that have been thrown your way. I have grace for you. I have even better news. God sees you.

You live in a cursed world. It will work against you.

* A thousand times over you will be held back, scarred and tripped up. Don't quit leaning into God and His people. The grace of Jesus carries us forward.

Jesus is making all things right and good. A better world is coming.

Next Steps Cards:

This leads to an important question:

How do we wait well? How do we live as a faithful remnant while we wait for the curse to be fully undone?

We worship.

What is worship? It is remembering God’s faithfulness—both in the past and the future. It’s an act of analepsis (looking back) and prolepsis (looking forward), celebrating His unchanging goodness across time and how it makes us whole.

"God is a God of joy, and His love for us knows no bounds. When He sings over us, it is a melody of redemption." – Charles Spurgeon[[3]](#footnote-4)

For those that need it clear, let me say it like this.

When Satan reminds you of the curse, you remind him of the future!

Everything on your Next Steps Card, it’s simply a reminder of a better future.

**Zephaniah 3:14-20 (ESV):**

"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. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: 'Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.' I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the Lord."[[4]](#footnote-5)

# Next Steps

Let’s worship.

References:

Bibliography:

The Bible. English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2001.

Carols for Choirs. "Joy to the World." Hymn Text by Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 98.

Charles Spurgeon. Morning and Evening. London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1866.

Scripture References:

Colossians 1:13–14

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:16

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

Ezekiel 36:26

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."

Matthew 5:13–16

"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 6:10

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Matthew 25:46

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Acts 17:28

For in him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring."

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5:18–20

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Romans 1:24–25

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:19–22

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Psalm 77:11–12

I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.

Revelation 20:11–15

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:1–5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

Revelation 22:3

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

Zephaniah 3:14–20

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. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

1. The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Barker, Kenneth L., and Waylon Bailey. The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Zephaniah. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Spurgeon, Charles H. Morning and Evening: Daily Readings. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1866. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)