

4. In the third verse of Silent Night we sing about the dawn of redeeming grace:
“Silent Night, holy night, Son of God, love’s pure light;
Radiance beams from thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.”

Compare the following Scriptures alongside the phrase from Silent Night – “with the dawn of redeeming grace”, and consider how God’s redeeming grace has dawned not only upon this world, but upon you and your family. Praise God for salvation and His wonder-filled ways!

Micah 5:2-5 Isaiah 9:2-7 Matthew 28:1-7 2 Peter 1:16-19
Revelation 19:11-16

MANGER THINGS

Text: Zephaniah 3:7-20

Plain Truth:

In Eden, humanity said, “_____”;
in Bethlehem God said, “_____.”

One Year Bible Reading

December 17: Nahum 1:1-3:19, Revelation 8:1-13, Psalm 136:1-26, Prov. 30:7-9
December 18: Habakkuk 1:1-3:19, Revelation 9:1-21, Psalm 137:1-9, Prov. 30:10
December 19: Zephaniah 1:1-3:20, Rev. 10:1-11, Ps. 138:1-8, Prov. 30:11-14
December 20: Haggai 1:1-2:23, Revelation 11:1-19, Ps. 139:1-24, Prov. 30:15-16
December 21: Zechariah 1:1-21, Revelation 12:1-17, Psalm 140:1-13, Prov. 30:17
December 22: Zechariah 2:1-3:10, Rev. 13:1-18, Ps. 141:1-10, Prov. 30:18-20
December 23: Zechariah 4:1-5:11, Revelation 14:1-20, Ps. 142:1-7, Prov. 30:21-23

Life Group Lesson

Week of December 17

During the time of the prophet, Zephaniah, Judah had so polluted itself with violence, injustice, idolatry, and religious pretense, that God's righteous judgment was set in motion. Like a floodgate about to break, the wrath of God's judgment was about to burst upon Jerusalem and all of Judah. Zephaniah spoke at a time when the leaders and those of influence had led the people into horrific pagan worship practices, mistreatment of the poor, civil degradation, and economic greed while shaking a defiant fist to God's holy ways.

Wickedness will be punished and God will hold us accountable for our sin if we don't repent. Day after day the LORD called out and warned His people: "Turn, turn back to me!" But an attitude of 'I will not' kept most of them from humble repentance. Like the people of Judah (and sister nation, Israel, so many years ago in the Old Testament) we insist upon our ways. We resist the One who calls out in desperate love and ignore the way of escape. We are sorely infected with a disease called sin. And yet, in the midst of our plight—the dawn of God's mercy still gives hope for any who would turn to Him for healing.

Read Zephaniah 3:1-20

As we read this passage, two things are clear: (1) Sin and wickedness will be judged but (2) God's mercy is always abundant for those "who trust in the name of the LORD" (v12). God sent His Son into this world to pay a price we could never pay. The Holy One born into this natural world by a natural mother, would one day take our place upon a cross and forever deflect the floodwaters of God's wrath toward sin – for all who look to Him in faith. This is God's 'I will' to man's 'I will not'. Perhaps the biggest symptom of this disease called sin is our pride and resistance to humbly admit we need a Savior. But any thinking individual who steps back, looks at himself/herself and looks at the plight of this world, will realize our only hope is Christ Jesus.

1. Think of the many people in Scripture who could have said 'I will not' but chose instead to say 'I will' to God's call – for example, Abraham, Jacob, David, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph. When have you decided to say (and live) 'I will' instead? What has been the fruit of that decision?

2. Then there were some like Moses who didn't want to go at first, but they did. For example, Jonah initially said 'I will not' and tried to run from God. But after being in the ocean for three days entombed in a fish, Jonah decided 'I will' after the Lord gave him a second chance. When have you told the Lord 'I will not' only to regret it?

When we choose to live with an attitude of 'I will' to the Lord's call – regardless of what the Lord asks us to do, no matter how God-sized the assignment before us, He will equip us with all we need to be faithful. Living into our 'yes' to God may be a tough trek at times, but the eternal reward of being obedient far outweighs any interim sacrifice we make. God is faithful to His covenant. He promised His people: "I will gather you who mourn... I will deal severely with all who have oppressed you. I will save the weak and helpless ones; I will bring together those who were chased away. I will give glory and fame to my former exiles... I will gather you together and bring you home again. I will give you a good name, a name of distinction, among all the nations of the earth" (see Zephaniah 3:18-20). Our God is all about 'I will' toward those who choose to follow Him. And ultimately, Jesus Christ, born into this world at Christmas, is God's 'I will' toward humanity – "For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding 'Yes!' And through Christ, our 'Amen' (which means 'Yes') ascends to God for His glory" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

3. Think about the people in your own life, that you have known personally, who have chosen to live into an 'I will' attitude toward the Lord. Who are they? How have they made a difference in the lives of others?

How has their obedience inspired you to walk on the side of faithfulness?

When the angel told Mary she would bear the Son of God, she responded: "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true" (Luke 1:38). When Joseph, initially perplexed at Mary's pregnancy and considering breaking their engagement, was visited by the angel, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded and took Mary as his wife (see Matthew 1:18-25). When the host of angels told the shepherds in the nearby fields of Bethlehem to go find the Christ Child, they went and then they told what they had seen! (see Luke 2:8-20) The Christmas story is full of ordinary people saying 'I will' to God, and as a result, they had a front row seat to the extraordinary work the Almighty.