

In the movie in your mind, blank black screen. (BUM BUM). Date in white letters, 630 BC. The black screen opens to an aerial shot of Jerusalem. You can see the palace and the temple, and just to the north the New Quarter of the city, and the city wall with an opening labeled "The Fish Gate." It's silent except the whistling wind. But outside the city wall, you see the hills. And the pebbles are trembling. And you can hear in the distance the sound of armies marching, and the sound is getting closer.

There's a quick cut to a man in the palace, frantically writing on a scroll. He's wearing a royal robe, and you recognize the prophet Zephaniah. The camera zooms out of the palace into the city streets. Ominous music begins. In the streets things are not quiet. Men praising an idol. Across the street a well-dressed merchant is bribing a judge. The music gets louder. At the entrance to the temple a young man kicks a beggar down the stairs and he looks over his shoulder at the priest, who shrugs and utters the first words of our movie, "The Lord won't do anything either good or bad." And it really seems like God does not care.

Just then the doors of the palace break open and Zephaniah runs into the street clutching a scroll above his head. **"The Word of the Lord!"** And as he reads the crowd forms two groups.

On one side are the Proud, who worship false gods, and who oppress the poor, the Proud who think "The Lord won't do anything. God doesn't care." The camera zooms in on their furrowed brows as Zephaniah reads, **"Woe to the city of oppressors, for the day of the Lord is near. On that day a cry will go up from the Fish Gate, wailing from the New Quarter. I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who think, 'The Lord will do nothing either good or bad.'" You hear the sound of marching as Zephaniah says, "I have decided to assemble the nations and to pour out my wrath on them."**

The camera pans to the other group of people, the Remnant and focuses on their hands, worn out, bruised and hanging limp at their sides. You can see that it seems like God doesn't care. Zephaniah reads, **"Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation, before the appointed time arrives. For this land will belong to the remnant of the house of Judah. The Lord, their God will care for them. And no one will make them afraid."**

The voiceover: "When it seems like God does not care but God says he does, which one is true?"

And the camera zooms out and we race over a timeline 60 years into the future. It's an aerial shot of Jerusalem again, and the armies have come and gone. The city is smoldering rubble. Smoke rises around the bodies of the arrogant. The voiceover: Does God care about sin?

You see people marching away from the city into the east and you recognize the bruised hands hanging limp. They aren't happy. But they have hope. They were spared. They have God's promise that they will come back and will live in that land. They have the words of Zephaniah ringing in their ears

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!

The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy.

The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you;

Never again will you fear any harm. On that day, they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.

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.

Sing Daughter of Zion!

So as they march, they sing the ancient song their fathers taught them, "Oh Lord, my God, many are the wonders you have done!"

Fade to black. (BUM BUM). A new date, 33 AD. The black screen opens to an aerial shot of the Jerusalem. It's been rebuilt and Roman soldiers are preparing an execution outside the city wall.

There's a quick cut to a close-up. The left side of the screen is filled with the face of a dignified governor from Rome. The right side is filled with the blood-streaked face of a rabbi from Nazareth. The governor asks, **"Are you the king of the**

Jews?" Jesus replies, **"Yes. It is as you say."** After waiting for 630 years, the people of Jerusalem finally have what Zephaniah promised. **"The king of Israel is with you; the Lord your God is with you."** Immanuel, God with us.

The camera pans over a mob outside the court and you can see two groups of people. The proud and the terrified. A flashback shows Jesus having compassion on the terrified, healing their limp arms, lifting hearts with the good news that **The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.**

But the proud cry out for the death of their king, the crucifixion of their God. The flashback ends and the camera snaps back to Jesus buckling under the weight of a cross, and it seems like God doesn't care. He's pinned up under the heading "The King of the Jews." The sky goes dark. An innocent man dies with a shout. The screen is black, and it seems like God doesn't care.

The voiceover: When it seems like God does not care, but God says he does, which one is true?

And Zephaniah's words are scrawled onto that black screen. **Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment.** The Lord has taken away your punishment and he has given it to another. This king of Israel saved you from punishment by accepting it in your place. That's how much he cares about you.

On the black screen a crescent shaped light appears and it grows until it's a single circle radiating light and out of the blackness steps the king of Israel, risen from the dead. And he quotes Zephaniah to you with the voice of God. **"I have turned back your enemy. The King of Israel is with you. Do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you."**

And Beethoven's Ode to Joy begins to swell, as you see Jesus reunited with his followers. His cheeks are streaked with tears now because he is overjoyed to see them, he quiets their fears with his love. And ringing in their ears is the prophecy of Zephaniah, **"Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! Sing, daughter of Zion!"**

They cling to their king and sing the ancient song their fathers taught them, "O Lord, our God, many are the wonders you have done!"

Fade to black. (BUM BUM) A new date, OCTOBER 13/14/15, 2018. It's a live shot of Amazing Grace Lutheran church in Panama City, Florida and it's silent. Pastor Burgess isn't preaching. The choir isn't singing. The organ isn't playing. Because Hurricane Michael has splintered the sanctuary like it was made out of toothpicks. It seems like God doesn't care.

The camera lifts and moves two miles away where looters are breaking into the local businesses and walking away with other people's livelihoods, and it seems like God doesn't care.

The camera lifts and moves 1000 miles north to Mount Olive Lutheran church, where a young man is preaching about Zephaniah, and nobody looks all that scared, forsaken, or lost. That is, until the thought bubbles start popping up above the heads of the congregation. "I'm tired." "I'm worried?" "I don't know about my future." "He doesn't love me anymore." "I'm depressed." "I'm tired." "How do I handle this diagnosis." "I lost my job." "I'm worried." And the thought that follows all of them, "It seems like God doesn't care." But in the service the scriptures keeps insisting that God cares.

The voiceover: "When it seems like God does not care but God says he does, which one is true?"

And the movie cuts to a fast forward version of all the stories you hear in Sunday school and you see the children of Israel in desperation at the Red Sea and God delivers them, just like God said he would. You see the Israelites marching around the walls of Jericho and shouting and the walls come tumbling down, just like God said he would. You see Zephaniah encouraging the remnant of Judah, and you see that remnant walking to Babylon, just like God said they would. You see the remnant marching back home 70 years later and rebuilding their city, just like God said they would. You see Jesus being born on Christmas night, just like God said he would. You see him suffer and die, just like God said he would. You see him rise from the dead, just like God said he would. You see him empower his disciples and start his church, just like God said he would. You see him preserve his church against attack after attack, just like God said he would. You see God bring you into the world bring you into his family through baptism, just like he said he would. You see him forgive all

your sins in the name of Jesus, just like he said he would. You see him defending you from harm last year, just like God said he would. You see him providing all you need, just like God said he would.

And your whole life fast forwards right up until now and the screen freezes in a close up of your eyes, just your eyes. And your heart beats (BUM BUM). When it seems like God does not care but God says he does, which one do you believe?

If there's one thing we can take away from the Lord's track record, it is that our troubles never come because the Lord doesn't care enough.

There are times when your thought bubble is tempted to say, "The Lord won't do anything either good or bad, so it doesn't matter if I commit a little sin." And the Lord cares about us prideful punks enough to say what he said to the proud in Zephaniah, **"The day of the Lord is near. I will search with lamps and punish those who think, 'The Lord will do nothing either good or bad.'"**

And there are times when your thought bubble is tempted to say, "The Lord won't do anything either good or bad, so he must not care that I'm suffering." And the Lord cares about us sorry saps enough to say what he said to the remnant in Zephaniah, **"The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save."** Some translations say, he is a mighty warrior.

Someday your warrior king will sweep away your troubles like he has swept away your punishment. And do you want to know what your king looks like in that scene? The book of Revelation gives us one description. Your king rides a white horse, wears a robe dripping with blood. In his mouth he holds a sword that is powerful enough to smash any nation. On his thigh he has a huge tattoo that says KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS, and he will destroy your troubles.

But but that's not today. Today the camera focuses on you and your thought bubble, and right behind you stands your warrior-king ready to save you from whatever trouble is in your life. Whatever you're facing it's not a punishment. It's not because God doesn't care. Whatever you're facing, your Savior is in complete control of it, and he is using it to keep you close to him until you get to heaven and live with him eternally.

So until that day your ears are ringing Zephaniah's words:

Sing, Mount Olive!

The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy.

The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you;

Never again will you fear any harm. On that day, they will say, "Do not fear, Christians; do not let your hands hang limp.

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.

Sing, Mount Olive!

And the people sing "Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged— Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness— Take it to the Lord in prayer."