

FAITH CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY

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"From the Pastor's Desk..."

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HAS ANYBODY ASKED YOU TO SING LATELY

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?" Ps. 137.1-4

The occasion for the above Psalm was the captivity of the Jewish people in Babylon, and the kind of treatment they endured there. There is a debate among Bible scholars as to who wrote this Psalm, but the assumption is that it probably was written by one of the captives who was held there and probably written sometime after their release.

There is no doubt that the writer was Jewish, but even more, one who had been held captive who felt strong about his native country and was most patriotic when it came to his feelings about Zion. While I have never been held captive throughout my life, I do have a sense of how the writer felt about the country from whence he came because every time I hear our National Anthem played I too feel that deep sense of patriotism.

This past month, being on vacation, both Ginny and I had the time and leisure to enjoy watching the Olympic games over television as young people around the world competed in their sport in order to have the high honor of winning one of those gold, silver or bronze medals. If you or your family were watching I am sure you probably enjoyed it as much as we did. Especially whenever one of our Americans would win a gold medal a band would play our National Anthem in the athlete's honor. We never grew tired of hearing it.

THE PATRIOTIC SONG

What Ginny and I experienced the previous weeks, much to our delight, was not the same thing that the Jewish people experienced in Babylon. Taken captive against their will, exiled from their homeland, suffering under the wrath and judgment of God for their disobedience as a nation for not serving the Lord; that was no time in which they felt like singing one of the Lord's songs. The scripture said, "they wasted us, required of us mirth."

As one of the Bible Commentators indicated: *"The Chaldeans, who plundered them of their substance, and reduced their city and temple to heaps of rubbish, at the same time insisted not only on having the words of a song repeated to them, but that they should be set to some tune and sung in a manner expressing mirth."* What these Babylonians were asking was as unreasonable as it was insulting.

Yet, when I read this Psalm in the Old Testament, I cannot help but think of another occasion in which two men, who were also taken captive against their will, held in a Philippian jailhouse, but found a way to turn their sorrow into joy. No one required of them to sing. But we read in the Book of Acts, that at midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them. (Acts 16:25).

So what do we have? One group of people being asked to sing the Lord's song, but somehow lacked the spirit and fortitude to do it. Yet on the other hand, in the Book of Acts, we find two men who could sing even without being asked. Now, I don't know what kind of singers Paul and Silas were, the Scripture didn't tell us that. But I believe we can rest assured that it wasn't the song that was flowing from their lips which made the impact on the prisoners around them, as much as the fact that they could sing in spite of what they were suffering.

THE LEPER'S SONG

I recently read the story of a pastor who went with his foreign colleague to visit a large leper colony. They were given permission to hold a service for the Christians there. One by one the lepers came limping in, swollen faces lifted in happy expectation. Obviously, those believers were so very familiar with the songs of Zion.

"What shall we sing?" one of the pastors asked, thinking that at least one of them would suggest a song like, "*I must tell Jesus all of my troubles.*" But that wasn't what they wanted to hear that day. Their response was far different. They requested the hymn whose words told that pastor that one can truly sing when their heart is full of the love of Jesus. Because the song they requested went like this:

*"Singing I go along life's road, Praising the Lord, Praising the Lord,
Singing I go along life's road, for Jesus has lifted my load!"*

THERE WAS NO SONG OF THE LORD IN BABYLON

Perhaps one of the reasons that the Jewish captives had no song in Babylon, is because they may not have had a song before they got there. It is hard to sing the Lord's song in the day of trouble if you have not been singing it before the trouble comes.

When we read the passage in Psalm 137 naturally our hearts become grieved for these people for what they suffered, especially whenever their thoughts tended to dwell on Zion. However, the reason for which these people found themselves in Babylon, was due to their lifestyle in Zion. If they had heeded to the preaching of the Prophets they would not have found themselves in a strange land, hanging their harps on a willow, and lacking the Lord's song.

Of late in my devotions I have been reading in the Book of Jeremiah and my attention was drawn to just one passage, which I know was repeated several times....but observe what Jeremiah told these people who eventually found themselves in Babylon: [Please note the words emphasized.]

"THE WORD that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim there this word and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Jeremiah 7:1-3

In other words what these people in Babylon were suffering could have been avoided if they would have only amended their ways. In another passage, Jeremiah was told, "*Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it.*" Jeremiah 5:1

God was so desperate to find someone who would be righteous that He would spare the city for the sake of one righteous person. This was much like it was when Abraham made intercession for Sodom which God would have spared if there had been ten righteous persons found in it. Gen.18:26-32.

One of the major concerns of the pastors that I keep hearing these days is the congregations which are no longer singing. The praise team and band on the platform do the singing, but few in the congregation are participating. Why does this happen? One of the reasons probably is due to the style of songs, the beat of the songs, and the songs themselves. Over the years of ministry I have learned one thing about a singing congregation – they are happy, victorious, and tend to grow in God. Music creates an atmosphere to hear the Word of the Lord.

So let's keep singing. Keep the melody of song in your hearts. When people ask for a song, make sure you have one that gives testimony of a victorious Christian life. So if your circumstances do change, like they did for Paul and Silas, you will still be able to sing the song of victory. Because your song does not depend on whether you are in Zion or Babylon...You can have a song in your heart, even in the night. Amen