

Summer Psalms
TOO SAD TO SING
Thursday, August 7
Reading: Psalm 137

Psalm 137:1 *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion...4 How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?*

After the triumphant praise of the last two psalms, Psalm 137 is a sad song indeed. The opening verse gives us the context - "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion." This is the painful cry of the Israelite captives ripped from their home in Jerusalem. As they sat in chains, their Babylonian captors mockingly tell them to "sing us one of the songs of Zion." How heartless!

We shudder as we read the last verse of this psalm. How could anyone wish such a thing as to dash children against the rocks? But let's delve a little into the grief of this psalmist. He has just witnessed his city Jerusalem invaded by a hostile enemy. Babylonian soldiers had plundered through its streets killing indiscriminately - men and women, the elder and the infants. Jeremiah gives a vivid description of Jerusalem's end in the book of Lamentations:

Our skin is hot as an oven, feverish from hunger. Women have been violated in Zion, virgins in the towns of Judah. Princes have been hung up by their hands; elders are shown no respect. Young men toil at the millstones; boys stagger under loads of wood. The elders are gone from the city gate; the young men have stopped their music. Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning." (Lamentations 5:10-15)

On top of this violence, the neighboring country of Edom acted like "cheerleaders" spurring the Babylonians on to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. The prophet Obadiah condemns them for gloating over its destruction and pillaging the city. They even caught those Jews trying to escape and turned them over to the enemy (Obadiah 1:10-14). This was doubly painful, for these were kin! The Edomites were descended from Jacob's twin brother Esau.

No wonder they could not sing! We can sympathize with these people. They are in shock and deep depression over the atrocities they have just endured. We might almost join them in their cry for God to do to their enemies what their enemies have just done to them! But I believe the perspective of the prophet Jeremiah is better in the face of calamity, Jeremiah had experienced all these things as well and writes:

So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD." I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him." The LORD is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him. (Lamentations 3:18-25)

When you cannot sing, you can always hope. When your world falls apart, God is always faithful.