

“The People Went into Exile”

continued from Sunday school lesson

November 19, 2006

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Psalm 137:1-9

- 1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
- 2 We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
- 3 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.
- 4 How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?
- 5 If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
- 6 If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.
- 7 Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.
- 8 O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.
- 9 Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

The Bible is telling us something that I want you to keep in mind. I was very sorrowful as we read this morning's Sunday school lesson.

As we studied already in the book of Chronicles; Nebuchadnezzar has come. He has killed the young, the old, and the innocent. He burnt the house of God, tore down Jerusalem and burnt it with fire. The whole place is just a pile of rebel.

As we pick up in Psalms; Zedekiah the king; when Nebuchadnezzar got inside the walls, he took off. He abandoned his people. Jeremiah told him what he was going to do. He said that he was going to be able to see Nebuchadnezzar, but he wouldn't see the land of Babylon. When Zedekiah took off, the armies of Nebuchadnezzar pursued him and caught him at Jericho, or there about, and the first thing that they did was kill his sons right before his eyes. All Zedekiah had to do was open up the gates and let Nebuchadnezzar come in; that's what the command was. You have already gone too far and there is no remedy for your sin now, just open up your gates and let

them come in. You are going to go into captivity but you are going to be able to spare yourself a lot of grief. You are going to be able to spare your people and you are going to be able to spare the temple of God. However, Zedekiah didn't do that. He takes off; trying to get away. The armies caught him and the first thing that they did was kill his own children right before his eyes.

Zedekiah is probably thinking now that Jeremiah wasn't so crazy. The law of God that said that we need to live righteously, godly and that we need to obey Him; didn't seem at all so crazy then. The law of God that said they needed to reverence Him and Him only; no doubt didn't seem so crazy to Zedekiah then. I'm sure that he wasn't thinking then about mocking Jeremiah; or despising God's Word. I'm sure when he saw his sons dying; I'm sure that he would have liked to have backed up and changed some things. It was too late though. He had already started down a path where there was no return.

A lot of folks in churches today, a lot of folks in America today, a lot of folks in the world today; have started down a path that there is no return. I know that God is a merciful God. I know that God loves us. I know that the grace of God goes a lot further than we ever dreamed that it could go, but the grace of God will never allow me to sin. The grace of God will never allow sin to go to heaven. We are His children and He absolutely loves us, but I promise when we sin that there is going to be repercussions and God is going to judge us.

The second thing that happened is this; they gorged out his eyes after they killed his children. You see your children die and then the next thing that happens to you is that you get your eyes punched out. That would have been horrible. They take Zedekiah and the rest of the captives to Babylon and when we pick up in Psalm 137 it says, *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.”*

When the people get carried to Babylon, they sit by the canals that are in Babylon. When you read about the canals and all the rivers that were there; Nebuchadnezzar and all his people made the children of Israel servants and slaves. They were the ones that dug the canals through the deserts and irrigated the land. Here they are sitting beside one of the canals that they have dug. The Bible says that they are weeping. Do you know why they are weeping? They can think back a few years on how good they had it and how good things were in Jerusalem. The time when they could come to the house of God, bring their offerings and their sacrifices unto the

house of God; the time when they could come to the house of God and worship. That's what they were thinking about.

They were thinking about home. They were thinking about where home was and how good that home use to be. Yet, home was a long way off. Home was something that a lot of them were never going to see again. They were going to die in Babylon. They were going to die as slaves. A lot of them were innocent. A lot of them had nothing to do with what went on, but yet they were caught up in what their family, some of their leaders, and some of the government officials did. They just went along with it and didn't think too much about it and they ended up in Babylon sitting down by a river and weeping when they remember Jerusalem. When they remember the good times when they could sit in their house with their own children, with their husbands, wives and their grandchildren. They could remember those times. Now the family is split up and no doubt some of them are dead. Here they are sitting by a river in a foreign land remembering the good old days.

The sad thing is that in our churches today; even in our Baptist churches, we have people that come, we have people that sit, we have people that participate but somewhere along the way they have been disobedient to God, they walked away from God, they did things that they shouldn't have done. God says that when you do this I am going to judge you; I'm going to judge your sin. A lot of folks are sitting by the river weeping and remembering the good old days when they used to come to the house of God and God would bless them and use them in a great way; when they could have fellowship and friendship with their family; that's what they are remembering. They are weeping on the inside because they know that they are a long way from where they need to be with God.

That's a sad thing when you and I have got it so good. We can come here and worship God freely. We can come and offer our words of praise and thanks unto God. We've got it made.

Here they are in a foreign land with a lot of their family dead and gone and they are sitting by a river weeping. The Bible says, "*We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.*" Their harp was a musical instrument that they used in their worship of Almighty God. It was an instrument that they could play and it made people happy.

I love to hear good music. It makes us happy and it encourages us. It does some great things for us. It makes us feel good.

These harps were part of their worship to Almighty God but now they took the thing that had brought so much joy to them, so much joy to the rest of their family, and to the rest of the people that were there; they took it and hung it in the weeping willow. There was no reason to play anymore. There was no happiness there, there was no joy there. They were in bondage.

Sure they were God's people and they were still yet Jews. That didn't change the fact. It changed their relationship with Him. They had walked away and they had sinned and now God is bringing them judgment. They very thing that just a few days before that had been such great joy and brought so much joy to them and to their family; they had hung it up.

God gives people gifts today; things that we can use for His glory in His service that we can worship Him. When we get in a foreign land, when remember the good old days while in a foreign land; there is no more desire in us to sing anymore. When we know that we are in a foreign land, when we know what our sin has done, when we do those things that are sinful and God judges us; we get to the point sometimes that we think, "I'll just quit." "There is no use anymore."

Remember this. Even though that we do sin, even though that God does not love our sin; He loves us and God wants us to repent. I don't care how bad you have been. I don't care how far you have gone in the strange land. I don't care how much you have sat. I don't care how long your harp has been hanging in the willow. There is still yet hope today. If you are still yet breathing, God still loves you and God can and will forgive you if you will just simply ask Him. That doesn't stay the hand of God and His judgment, but it does get us back to the place that we can use those things that God has given us to bring glory to Him.

They hung up their harps. A lot of people are doing that today. The things that God has given us for use for His glory and to be a blessing to us and to be a blessing to other people; we have hung them in a weeping willow tree. We are sitting beside the river now, feeling sorry ourselves.

The Bible says, *“For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song...”* The Babylonians wanted them to sing. They wanted them to take the harp and sing some songs. Sing some songs about Zion. Sing some songs about Jerusalem. Sing some songs about your God. That's a hard thing to do when you are in a strange land, when you are not home, and when you think about all the horrible things that you did and allowed.

Your children are dead because of your sin. Maybe your husband or your wife is gone because of sin. The city is gone. The house of God is gone because of sin. Here they are and people want them to sing. It's hard to sing when we are weeping. It's hard to sing when we remember what we have done and how awful we have been. It's hard to sing.

The Bible goes on and says, *“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.”* Sing one of the songs about Jerusalem.

A lot of times the songs that we use to sing that brought so much joy to our hearts, that brought so much joy to our church services, and to people around us; we can't sing them anymore because we are a long way from home. We are in a strange land. We are servitude unto another master. That's what they were. They want us to sing, but we can't sing. It's a sad place to be.

The Bible says, *“How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?”* It can't be done. The Bible says, *“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.”* They are saying—most people are right handed and most people would strum or pick the harp with their right hand and chord it with their left—*“Jerusalem, if I forget about you, if I forget about thinking about you; then the thing that use to bring so much joy and the thing that God has given us to praise and worship Him; that will be cut off.”* That's a serious statement to make.

It also says, *“If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”* When we forget about God, it's just like the gift that God has given us in that it cannot be used anymore for His joy. Cutting off the right hand of these folks would have meant that they could never play the music; they could never worship God again. They are saying, *“If I don't remember thee anymore, cut off my hand. If I forget about Jerusalem, if I forget about Zion; then let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.”* That means that they are not going to be able to praise Him anymore.

A lot of folks in America today, in our churches today; they are no longer praising God. They have walked from God. We don't like to use the word "backslide" but the Bible is full of it. We grow cold and indifferent. We walk away from God. Sure we are still yet God's children, but we are a long way from where we need to be with Him. Don't you remember the good old days? Don't you remember when you use to sing and God would bless you? Don't you remember when you use to testify and God would bless you? Don't you remember when you use to come to church and hear good singing and God would bless you? Don't you remember when you would come and hear people teach and preach and God would bless you? Don't you remember days like that? Don't you want to get back there? Don't you want to get back to where you need to be with God?

We may have done some horrible things. We may have committed atrocities. We may have committed some horrible sins, but yet there is hope.

God said these folks are going to be here for seventy years and that they were not going to come out until these seventy years were expired. That tells me that we may be here for a while, we may be in a place that God is going to judge us for a while, but there is hope for us this morning. This nation looked like they were gone. We know the end of the story. We know that they were not gone. God is a very merciful and longsuffering God.

Next week's lesson is about Ezra--about Ezra and what he is going to be able to do. Even though we sin, God is going to judge our sin and God will forgive us of our sin if we will repent. God will restore us and we can build the house of God again. They did! We can build the walls back up again. They did! There can be a place of safety and security; it can be a place of worship. We can get back to where we use to be worshiping Almighty God as God wants us to worship Him.

God loves you and God cares about you. He will forgive you, if you will just ask Him.