

The No-Song Song

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- [0 : 0 0] Psalm chapter number 137, here's the what outline. Call an exegetical outline, but I like the little way that John Pearson has taught the teenagers through year. What, so what, and now what?
- So just what are we looking for? If you look down at Psalm 137 before I read it, I want you to look for in the first four verses, you're going to find a lament. That's a cry out to God. You're going to first see their memory of Zion with tears.
- Then they're going to talk about harps on trees that are hung up. And I'll explain what's going on there. A memory of scornful captors. People saying, sing us a song. Sing us one of those songs that you like to sing.
- Memory of the Lord's song that they once used to sing, but how are they going to do it now where they're at? And then there's a promise that is made to never forget Jerusalem and never fail to make Jerusalem your highest joy.
- Verse 6. Then we get on to what I would call, it's a betrayal by the Edomites. These were people that should not have been bringing hurt to Israel. These were not supposed to be the bad guys of the stories.
- [1 : 0 0] That's supposed to be like the Amorites. But these are the Edomites. These are the family members of Israel here. And there's a betrayal in verse 7. And the two negative Beatitudes, which is this.
- This is the imprecatory psalm, the one that's kind of like the rage that I was talking about. Like, whoa, I can't believe that's in the Bible. It's happy is the one who repays Babylon for what they did.
- And happy is the one that dashes Babylon's infants against the rocks. I told you there's a lot here, okay? And so this poem here, this psalm, is a beautiful example of opposing memories that play against one another.
- Two locations, Babylon and Jerusalem. At one moment you see the rivers of Babylon and tears and harps hanging. And then another one you see these images of Jerusalem, the strong joy and deepest thoughts that are there.
- But there's still no music. Because the strange things of Babylon have kept the people from singing in a strange land. So the title that I gave to this psalm tonight is the No Song Song.
- [2 : 0 2] The No Song Song. They said we can't sing. How are we going to sing in a strange land? So we need to buckle up. This is an emotional roller coaster.
- Verse 1. By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down. Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that are carried us away captive required of us a song.
- And they that wasted us required of us myrrh. Saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
- 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. Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem, who said, Raise it up, raise it up even to the foundation thereof.

O daughter of Babylon, who art thou to be destroyed? Happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth the little ones against the stones.

[3 : 06] Heavenly Father, with the time that we have here, Lord, I pray that your word will speak to your people. Lord, we are a people who do not desire to be controlled by our emotions.

But Lord, we are people that you made with emotions that should be surrendered to you. Father, I pray that you will help us as this psalm, which was written first and foremost by the Holy Spirit for us tonight.

I pray that your word will apply healing upon the hearts of people. Lord, I pray that we will look and we will gain knowledge. Lord, we will also give our hearts over to what your word has for us.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. So the first thing that you saw in the reading is just the record of pain as it speaks about. So what's happened here? How did we get to this scenario?

So Israel has been sent into exile because of her own sin. A big portion of this Bible here is God sending people and warning them that that's going to come and they don't listen. We have the book of the Limitations that we went through.

[4 : 14] This incredible picture and imagery of what has happened. And in Psalm 137, the rivers of Babylon, they're sitting down beside it and they're weeping. And they're thinking about how they could be back at Zion.

And they hang up their hearts there along the trees. And so it's picturing the people that are maybe they're working by the canals that are flowing in the Babylon.

And maybe there's some kind of slave labor, if you could picture that. People that are out in the field and they're allowed to be given a break. And when they're on their break, they might try to sing their songs and they might have their harps.

And maybe they're hiding up the harps in the trees so that they're not stolen. But you have these people out here in a strange land with their instruments. And what once was used to be played and to worship our Lord is now hanging here in a tree.

And then there's a request there. There's a request to play the... And then they come to them and they say, play the harp. Or they play, say, sing us a song. Sing some of those songs that you used to sing in Zion.

[5 : 19] And require us to be... We want you to be happy. And they say these things to them. You probably can think of a time in your life where you hung up a harp. You can probably think of a time in your life where it was an event that caught you by surprise.

Or maybe it happened slowly over a little bit of time. But the way in which you worship the Lord, it stopped. And now it's just sitting there waiting to be picked back up by you.

And so the Bible teaches that judgment begins in the house of the Lord. And this judgment more so than being a judgment against the nation. It's against God's people and they're experiencing this enormous and crippling pain because they deserved judgment.

So that's what happened. And then, but what do we learn from that? And we learn something about the dreadfulness of sin. We learn that there is sin according to God's order and law in this world.

And the consequences are much more devastating than we could ever imagine. If you're ever at a place in life that you're recognizing how big and powerful sin is, you should step back and thank God.

[6 : 23] Because it's that lack of understanding that keeps people in lostness. People will live and die and never cry out to Jesus for forgiveness because they simply don't have a right perception of how big sin is.

And then also people will live their whole life, their Christian life, living in sin or entertaining these things of sin because they never see how big it is. And so we live our lives considering it, trying to minimize how big a deal that it is in our lives.

But there come certain moments where we say, that right there wants to kill me and you're aware of it. When you have that type of clarity in life, you ought to praise God.

William Plummer, who writes about the Psalms, very helpful. This is what he says regarding what that thought. He says, He's speaking of our Lord.

And so when we sin, so when we see sin punished like this, we must be witnessing just judgment against something that is dreadful at a magnitude beyond our capacity of explanation.

[7 : 38] When we see the consequences of sin, we ought to say, Woe is me. I could be there and recognize it and ask the Lord to search our heart.

And then, so what should we do? We should, this should press us to confess our sins. When Daniel was in captivity, and because of his sin, Israel was sent into Babylon, he comes in the book of Jeremiah, and you can look in Daniel chapter 9.

But the scroll of Jeremiah, they find out of the depth of God's plan, this judgment that's coming to come. And I'm going to read to you, and I hope you'll stay with me. I'm going to read six verses here for you. But it gives what happens when Daniel finds the scroll of Jeremiah.

It says, In the first year of Darius, the son of Herxes, of the seed of Medes, which was made king over the realm, the Chaldeans. In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood by the book of the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

And I set my face unto the Lord, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and I made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keep the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments.

[8 : 57] We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled. Even by departing from thy precepts and from judgments, neither have we hearkened unto thy servants, the prophets, which spake thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

When coming to the place and recognizing what was happening, Daniel here says, I've set my face to the Lord, I seek prayer and supplication, fasting, sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord, and I made confession.

O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant. The Bible tells us, 2 Chronicles, If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land.

That will be a familiar passage to us that we keep reading, because that should be our response when we see the consequences of sin being lived out in our lives.

In verse number 1 it says, We wept when we remembered Zion. And so now they're remembering a place that they had taken for granted. Israel did not put the great value of the blessings of God that they had, because that's what sin is doing to us.

[10 : 09] Sin is maximizing the blessings, if you will, of Satan over the blessings of the Lord. It is telling you what God's given you is not sufficient enough, and so you need something else.

We have no clearer picture, right? In the Bible, Adam and Eve's created, have everything they need. One thing's outside of their reach they're not supposed to have. And so the desire, and that's the first example, that's the first sin that we have in God's scriptures.

And so Israel does not value, except for the fall of Satan. All right, I need to make sure that's clear. First one by mankind. And so Israel here, they don't value the blessing of God when they had them.

And so now what does the enemy wants to do, is he wants to torment them with the memory of how things were. Sing us a song like you used to sing.

And this is awful. Sing us the song of Zion. And all this should cause us to confess our sins and turn to God. And then they ask the question in verse number 4. How shall we sing the song, the Lord's song, in a strange land?

[11 : 08] In a book called In the House of the Lord by Michael Jenkins, he says, The Psalms of lament open us to the greatness of God, who not only can hear, but also can handle our pain, our self-pity, our blame, and our fear, who can respond to our anger, our disillusionment in the midst of oppression and persecution, under the boot of tyranny, and our sense of God-forsakenness, in the face of life's more profound alienation and exiles.

And so these Psalms here give us permission, it gives us encouragement to lay our struggles out before the Lord. Sin pulls us away from the Lord. The consequences of our sin cause us to hide from Him and to see that He is gone.

And you're going to see this in the Psalms. We're always asking, where is the Lord? And we know that the Lord is unmovable. We know that the Lord does not hide Himself from us. But sin causes us to believe that He has somehow moved on us.

And in that place is where we need to be crying out to Him is the time in which we most certainly don't want to do it. I'll give you a few examples. Psalm 22 and verse 1 says, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Why art thou so far from helping me and from the words of my roaring? Psalm 44, 23. Awake thou, sleepest, O Lord. Arise, cast us not off forever. Wherefore, hidest thou thy face and forgettest our affliction and our oppression.

[12 : 26] Psalm 80, 12. Why hast thou broken down her hedges, so that all that which pass by thy way do pluck her? Psalm 88, 14. Lord, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou face from me?

These are heartfelt questions that have been asked in the Bible and they're there all throughout the Scriptures and we often overlook them. Another way in which the complaint, it moves from an accusation, accusing God of being disinterested in them.

Psalm 10, 1 says it like this, Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest thou thyself in the times of trouble? Why is the Lord hiding Himself?

And we all know that that is not the case, but that is how it's perceived. And so it's not that just God is standing far away. The problem is that they feel that God is hiding Himself. This word hiding, it can mean a secret, or it can be hidden or concealed, but it also means emotional meanings, like withdrawn or ignoring or pretending, you know?

Hiding, you know? When the kids are supposed to be helping Stephanie clean the house and I'm in the garage because I have something I need to put up, all right? That's the kind of hiding that's being accused of.

[13 : 37] It's just off in the distance, kind of withdrawn from what is going on. And so that's what the psalmist is accusing the Lord of. And that should make you uncomfortable.

It probably does, or it should. The psalmist is basically accusing God of not being very God-like. And that's what's being said. So we're not comfortable with that. And there's this deep struggling with this pain.

And there's an injustice as one thing, but then God's lack of intervention is deeper pain, one that creates complaint. And that brings way to these hard questions. Life is filled with a variety of suffering.

Sorrow can come into your life in many ways. Unfulfilled longings, loneliness, chronic pain, unfair supervisor at work, can form of joblessness or financial struggles or conflicts in our marriages.

The lament speaks to all those different sorrows, whether they be small or they be big. And the longer we live, the more pain that we will seem. God could intervene, but there are times, many times when He chooses not, and there's the tension of complaint.

[14 : 42] And then we end here with these last couple verses. These are the harsh things. This psalm is so full of emotion that it's giving us and speaking about what the Lord is doing. And they said, I want Zion to be the center of my joy.

I don't want anything else to be greater. That's not just a geographic location. It's like, I want nothing to be more important to me than Zion that God would give.

But it doesn't stop with just saying that. That would be one place in the psalm. We're in Babylon. We want to get back to Jerusalem. But it ends with these strong statements here. These imprecatory prayers are difficult.

I'm glad that I don't have to address them often. It's important to remember that this prayer ceases. This isn't a person that's emotionally out of control, just speaking from the top of their head, wanting to vent, as people would say, which is to say, I need to let off some steam.

But these are turned, these are wishes, these are prayers unto the Lord that the Lord would deal with the justice of their adversary. The difference between an imprecatory prayer and just hateful thoughts towards people would be the difference between the murder and killing of somebody and killing somebody in war to be sent off.

[15 : 58] People sent off in the military to fight for us are not the same as a person committing a murder in our community. It's not the same. These imprecatory prayers are saying, God, I want you to be glorified and I want to put this into your hand.

David, we see many times, he doesn't take things into his own hand. He could have killed Saul on occasions. Romans 12, 19 tells us, Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath. It is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord, and pray to be avenged.

So the New Testament forbids us to take our own vengeance, but it doesn't tell us that we cannot, that we should despair of future judgment. And so Revelation 6, 10, you're going to see there's no discernible difference between the prayer of Psalms that we've looked at tonight and the prayer of the martyrs in Revelation 6, 10, which is, And they cried with a loud voice saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, does Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

And there's no rebuke there. These are people asking the Lord for vengeance. So there we are. It's the roller coaster. It is the, We miss Zion so much, it should be the center of joy.

Father, if I forget Zion, make it so that my right leg is like Brian's cherries and it just doesn't work anymore, all right? Brian pulled a hamstring back there, all right? It's just a discernment.

[17 : 21] You can't see it from here, guys. You don't have to look at it, all right? And it's like saying, Let me forget, just forget how to walk or forget how to speak. Like, I don't, if I don't know how good it is to be in the presence of God, I don't want to know anything else.

That's the prayer. I want to remember and I want to seek to be in the presence of God and I want that type of joy more than anything else. I don't want anything else. I don't want to just escape on a vacation. I don't want to just be a little bit better.

I want what's available to me. Incredible joy, but incredible sadness. We can't even sing now. The harp is hung up there. And then we go from there and then we just see these questions.

Just talking to God. How, Lord? How do you expect for me to sing in a strange land? Get me back to Zion and I'm going to do that.

And then just, God, I'm asking for you to avenge. And I just picture here in the ways of application, because Andrew told you I would give you some application tonight. So I will try to do that.

[18 : 19] Pray that the Holy Spirit helps you make individual application in your own life as we go through this. And I would say that we need to remember, as I said, it's unbridled emotion, melancholy, nostalgia, and the rage.

But you've experienced the consequences of sin and you experience every emotion and you can feel forsaken. You can feel anger to the cause of the sin and you desire the day that the tormentors are being tormented themselves.

And you're asking how you can sing in a strong land. And I would encourage you to confess sin, pray to the Lord, and patiently wait for the day that your song returns.

That's all you can do is you can say, Lord, I know why I'm here in Babylon. I confess my sins and Father, I turn to you and I seek no other joy than the joy that you can provide for me.

And then just stand there patiently underneath the tree until the day that you can take the harp down and you can head back into that place. I'm going to give you a moment to pray there in your seat.

[19 : 19] And before we begin to pray, I'd just like to encourage you to consider that. We deal with the consequences of sin on like all kinds of levels. I mean, you might think of it on a big level.

I mean, maybe there's something you did and now you got, you know, I want to make up something I don't have in here, but just, you have a pending court case, okay? Or you have, you've got yourself into some kind of dead and now there's that kind of stress in it.

Or you did something wrong and now you know you have to fix it. And there's those big consequences of sin that we have to work through and they're honest all the time. But we also deal with it on a day-to-day level when you just say, I am not living and walking with humility.

I'm not walking in the way that Lord would have me to. I'm just not living surrendered to Him. And I'm just struggling. I just feel like my whole life is like wading through peanut butter.

There's a visual for you, isn't it? It just feels harder than it should be. There's wading through life. And I want to encourage you is to get honest with the Lord. Make confession and say, this weight I'm carrying that makes life harder, I'm not even supposed to be carrying it.

[20 : 27] This doesn't even belong to me. Confession, taking it off and then crying out to the Lord. And just stand there and say, I've confessed to the Lord and now I'm waiting and ask Him to give you to allow you to return with your harp to that city of Zion so you can worship Him.

And you should want that more than everything. We are so, why don't we have, the expression, why don't we have more of God than we have? It's because we're so satisfied with so little, right? Why don't we have a deeper walk with the Lord?

Why don't we have all these things? Because we're just so satisfied with what we have. Sin and its consequences, the wonderful aspect is it reminds us that we're doing something we weren't made for and so we thank God and we turn from it and we repent and we say we have Zion, our time with the Lord is at the center of what we want.

Not going to be satisfied to come back in that place. As a piano player comes, I want to give you a moment to pray there in your seat and to consider or to respond in the way that you should.

Some of you may know exactly right now an area of sin that you should confess and say, I want to set this weight off that has just been holding me back. I want to set this aside and I want to rejoice in the Lord.

[21 : 38] I'm in a strange land but I still have a loving God that's ever present in my life and in whatever state we are in, we should be content and we can praise the Lord. So right now, believer, I would encourage you to set aside those weights that beset you, confess your sins unto Him and ask Him to restore that joy of your salvation.

and there is just a golden and you have a to