

January 8, 2009

Psalm 137 (NASB)

**By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down and wept,
When we remembered Zion.
Upon the willows in the midst of it
We hung our harps.
For there our captors demanded of us songs,
And our tormentors mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”**

**How can we sing the Lord’s song
In a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
May my right hand forget her skill.
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
If I do not remember you,
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.**

**Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom
The day of Jerusalem,
Who said, “Raze it, raze it
To its very foundation.”**

**O daughter of Babylon, you devastated one,
How blessed will be the one who repays you
With the recompense with which you have repaid us.
How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones
Against the rock.**

Remembrance is a theme that has caught my attention of late, and it is a powerful element of this psalm. This psalmist shares with us the aftershocks of a nightmarish event that changed his life. He writes from exile in Babylon. Home and homeland are no longer in sight. Cultural patterns and religious practices have been ripped out of their contexts and, in some cases, would have lost the distinctiveness that made them holy. The exiles—those who survived—still lost their lives when Jerusalem fell. If only they had remembered and returned before the Babylonians came.

When life condemns us to a slow death, we may feel the same way this psalmist felt. We may even hiss for revenge or retribution or righteous judgment—whatever we wish to call it—like this psalmist does. And so, what if we do? What if we lash out in anger over the cruelty that we suffer? What if we think, and speak, and act in ways that in times of peace and safety we would think were unbecoming of Jesus’ disciples? It sounds ugly, but is this psalmist ungodly in what he says at the end of this psalm? Or is there a time and place for the outcry bred by horror and abuse?

We ought to wrestle with such questions. Life is not all roses and rainbows. There are thorns and storms along the way. In every time and in every place, God is there. He will hear our cries, because He is faithful to His promises. If only we will remember. . . .