

Psalm 137

The psalmist writes

“by the rivers of Babylon,
where we sat down.
oh, oh, we wept
when we remembered Zion.

How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land”

So - it feels like we’re in a strange land, and this seemed like an appropriate psalm.

For the Jews, they were writing about a time, around 600 BC, when they were taken from the homeland, from Jerusalem, Zion - into captivity in Babylon.

A new country, new language, new people. They had lost their land, their jobs, their families, everything - had been torn away from them. They were physically in a strange land, but also they were in the strange land of grief and desperate loss, which often expresses itself in anger.

And they felt particularly cut off from their one source of consolation - God.

Like most other nations at that time, the Jews had the idea of a territorial God. There was the God of the Hittites, or the Jebusites, and the God of the Israelites. For the Jews this was particularly strong as this was the land that their God has promised them, when they came out of slavery in Egypt. So the the land was their link to God, and Jerusalem was the place that God appeared, they could speak to him there. So to take the people away from this land, was to remove them from being connected to God, from his protection or deliverance.

“how can we sing the Lord’s song, in a strange land?”

We all feel a little cut off - from one another, from our normal lives, from our God. And how can we worship when we can’t come to Church, we can’t go out, we can’t meet together? It feels very alien and strange. We are like the singers of psalm 137 - in a strange land, struggling.

Yet, here’s the ironic thing. They are singing Psalm 137 - they sing - how can we sing?! So in fact, they have found a way to sing. Here is the key. That what happened to the Jews in exile in Babylon was that their God got bigger! Instead of finding themselves cut off from God, they continued to worship him and found that he wasn’t just the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - he was the God fo the whole world. And he can be found in Jerusalem but also in Babylon!

So we have to keep on worshipping, singing about how we cannot sing, and discover that God is bigger. God can be found not only in old church buildings, but even in our living room or through eh internet. (There’s something I never thought I’d write!)

So keep on believing that God is with you.

And, yes, if you read psalm 137 to the end, you’ll find it gets a bit nasty. The Psalms are full of all human life - all human emotion - the happy bits, the “isn’t god wonderful” but also the “aghh - I hate this” and “where are you God?”. And in context, these people have just lost everything, and no wonder they are angry at the Babylonians and want God to do something about it. And God is big enough to take it - he knows they don’t mean it, but its good and healthy for them to let it out, to vent their anger, and he’s the perfect place to take it. And we might feel frightened, and angry and frustrated at being kept indoors and all that - and we shouldn’t pretend its all ok. We should be honest and let it out - and maybe God is the best place to do that.

We will get through this together, and our God will be bigger!

Simon
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