



JOHNSON AVENUE
Church of Christ
WHERE *God's Family* BUILDS ETERNAL HOMES

A Spiritual Encouragement Message

May 1, 2020

We have been examining the advice that God gave to the people of Israel when they found themselves in bondage to the Babylonians. Our previous articles defined that advice. "Bloom where you are" "don't pine for the past" and "live in realityville, not fantasyland". This is all good advice in our present situation as well.

To those Jews, it is now 597 B.C. and a large group of Jews are in Babylon. It is impossible for us to fully understand how they felt about what had happened to them. They were in Babylon.

To them it was the center of evil.
They hated everything the Babylonians stood for.
They hated them for their cruelty.
They hated them for their violence.
They hated them for their idolatry.
They hated them for attacking the city of God.
And eleven years later, they would hate them even more for destroying the temple.

And because God had said they would be there for 70 years, the Jews in exile knew that most of them would never see their homeland again.

Psalm 137:1-3 adds that they were so miserable in Babylon that they hung their harps on a willow tree and refused to sing the songs of Zion:

*By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
we hung up our lyres.
For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*

It was like those old Western movies where the bad guys capture someone and then shoot at his feet, trying to make him dance. That's what the Babylonians did to humiliate the exiles day and night.

So, what do you do when God doesn't seem to come through for you? Or when he doesn't live up to your expectations?

The answer to all of this is simple. The real problem is not God not living up to our expectations. It's us not living up to his expectations. The worst wounds are self-inflicted. Rarely will anyone hurt us as bad as we hurt ourselves. There is no pain like the pain of:

Making a stupid mistake,
Saying something we should not have said,
Hurting those we love the most,
Breaking their trust,
Violating our conscience,
Repeatedly doing wrong,
Saying "I'm sorry" and then doing it again,
Promising to do better and doing worse,
Failing to live up to our own standards,
Disappointing those who depended on us.

That's the ragged edge of pain that keeps us awake at night, that makes us toss and turn, that's the basis of guilt that overwhelms us with sorrow and makes us feel like we've blown everything. There is no pain greater than the pain of looking at the ruins of what might have been and knowing that you are responsible for the wreckage.

And that's precisely how the Jews felt in Babylon.

Rejected.

Humiliated.

Trapped.

Judged.

Condemned.

Forgotten.

They had become a laughingstock among the nations, just as the prophets had predicted. At last we return to the question I asked at the beginning. What do you do when you don't like the circumstances of your life and it seems as if those circumstances aren't going to change anytime soon? The answer is that God doesn't look at our circumstances the same way we do. We don't like where we are, and we wish we were somewhere else doing something else. Be encouraged, child of God. If we feel trapped, know that we're not. God lets us know that we can worship him even in "Babylon".

Randall Jarrell