

Of Prophets & Kings: The Judean Exile (Part 1) **“The Bitterness of Babylonian Captivity”**

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden for FUMC
Grand Junction, Pentecost Sunday, August 7, 2022

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/worship-services>

Scripture Text:

Psalm 137 [NRSV]

♪ “On the Willows”, from *Godspell*

SERMON THOUGHTS

It is, indeed, difficult to sing the LORD’s songs in an environment hostile to the music. And when the audience is cruel in its taunts and gleeful over the pain of the players and singers, it is downright impossible. You just mute the mic’s, unplug the guitars, close the piano lid, put the drumsticks back in the bag, and well...go home.

It’s an incredible metaphor for the experience of the Hebrew people as they asked how the impossible could have happened.



“How could we be in chains, being led away from Jerusalem with the city and Temple in flames over our shoulders, led to the hated Babylon

gloating now over our defeat?” What would it look like to you and me, here in the Grand Valley today? I

can’t even imagine it... It probably feels this way in eastern Ukraine right now. Or maybe what the Utes here in western Colorado and other Indian tribes felt across the nation back in the day. (*Extend the historical Exile to the experience of challenges, waywardness, and the hardness of life creating “exile-like” conditions, feeling like separation from God.*)

And if we rush to explain it (the Judean Exile), we risk doing injustice to the experience of dislocation, defeat, isolation, devastation, and hopelessness that accompanied them by the rivers of Babylon. A revival preacher once said, “When God sends tribulation, He ’spects you to *tribulate!*”

And so, today – and just for today – we’re going “tribulate”! We’re simply going to try to feel something of the devastation of the people that only a poet could put in terms so stark that we can feel the pain of the people AND the heartache of God at the same time.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

(*Unpack the Psalm:

(*✓ The trauma of the first 4 verses.

(*✓ Then, “How could we not sing the songs of the LORD in a place of exile?”

(*✓ Gives rise to the exclamation by the Psalmist in vv. 5 & 6. Faith, trust, ingoing commitment to

(* the patterns and practices of faith in the midst of exile – or exile-like conditions.*)

(*✓ Then, the significance of the charge against Edom – refer to Obadiah from a couple of weeks back.*)

(*✓ Finally, the bitterness expressed in vv. 8 & 9.*)

The Good News: God never turns away from a repentant sinner. God didn't abandon the Hebrew people in Babylon forever, and God won't abandon us in exile, either.

CONCLUSION

Paradoxically, this could've been avoided (if the people had but listened to the Prophets), but it was, ultimately, inevitable (because they wouldn't). I can hear the words of the Prophets ringing out: *God's people cannot go on indefinitely violating what it means to be God's people and not, eventually, cease to be God's people.*

The object lesson is an ominous warning to us in our day.

- What does it mean for us to be God's people here and now?
- How have we violated God's clear instructions spoken through the prophets, like this from Amos (5:21-22a, 23-24):
 - ²¹ I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
 - ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them;
 - ²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
 - ²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
- How have we allowed the idols of wealth, power, politics, greed, ideology, pride, and any of a

number of other things to take God's rightful place in our lives?

→ And, as importantly, what do we do about it?

TRANSITION to COMMUNION

We can start today, at this time, by recognizing our dependence upon the mercy of God, as the Hebrew people did as they wept beside the rivers of Babylon, swearing never to forget Jerusalem.

As Christians, though, we recognize our dependence upon the mercy of God whom we know in Jesus Christ, who invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. So, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart.

We have failed to be an obedient church.

We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy.

Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear the Good News:

Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

*In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!
Glory to God. Amen! (*On to Communion liturgy*)*