

I'd Rather Not Sing, If You Don't Mind

By Gerald W. Griffin

I understand the poet's reluctance (Psalm 137). He is recalling a time when he was asked to sing and simply did not feel like it. He has been taken captive to a strange land. He is away from the city of God, away from the familiar worship of his homeland, and in the midst of a culture where he is out of place. For the poet, melancholy becomes the norm. Held a captive in Babylon, feeling like anything but a victorious follower of Jehovah, he is recalling the glorious times, but only with a distant longing that it was so again. In fact, there were times he sat and remembered . . . and wept.

The locals would like to hear one of the old songs of joy. "Sing one of your worship songs," a resident requests. I suppose the request could be wickedly motivated, or it might be an attempt to help. Maybe the local believes it would help to get the mournful believer singing the songs that used to bring him such comfort. Or maybe the Babylonian merely wants some entertainment and would like to hear some Jewish music.

It really does not matter why he is being asked to sing the song. He does not intend to cooperate. He does not feel like singing right now. In fact, unable to sing, the poet retires the instrument.

Reluctance We Can Understand

I understand the reluctance, don't you? There are times when your songs of faith don't make much sense . . . not even to those who believe the truths. There are times

when we feel as if we have anything but "victory in Jesus," when our "blessed assurance" has become "I may have an outside shot," and when "it is well with my soul" would be more honestly sung, "I'm falling apart here."

Faith We Don't Feel

It would be nice if being a person of faith meant that there were never times we felt less than confident. How great it would be if we could live on a constant high. However, sometimes I continue to believe even though I do not now feel like it. I will believe because I know God has proven himself faithful. Even though I do not always feel like singing the songs, I know that the songs are true nonetheless. I will wait for a better time.

And the wait might be the key here. Read the psalm again. This writer is remembering what it was like while in Babylon. The trial is over; he is now home. The sitting, weeping, and remembering are all in the past.

There are times I do not have it in me to sing. At those times, would you do me a favor and sing anyway . . . sing for me? I need to be reminded what it is we believe. And if you are currently having trouble singing, hang on and wait. God is faithful. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

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"By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'

How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?"

—Psalm 137:1-4

New International Version