

Singing in the Reign  
1 Peter 2:9-17, (Psalm 137:1-9)  
March 1, 2009

- I. Read Psalm 137.
- A. WHOA! “This is scripture?”
  - B. Yup! This is scripture, although we seldom read it, or at least its last few lines, in worship.
  - C. We generally avoid using this text because of its bitterness and cruelty.
    - 1. *O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction (ha, ha, ha, sorry about that, see ya later), happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us—he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.*
    - 2. There doesn't seem to be much inspiration in that thought.
    - 3. And the first four verses are no picnic either.
      - a. *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept.*
      - b. *How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?*
  - D. What we're looking at here in this psalm is the problem of Singing in the Reign.
    - 1. The reign I'm talking about here is spelled r-e-i-g-n, and it defines an area ruled over by a king.
    - 2. And when I use the term “Singing in the Reign,” I'm referring to singing in the reign of a foreign king while living as an exile in another land, which is exactly what we're looking at here in Psalm 137.
  - E. Psalm 137 looks back to Judah's experience of captivity and exile in Babylon.
    - 1. It points out that it's hard to sing when you have been carried off from the land of your birth and are forced to reside in an alien nation.
    - 2. It makes you so mad you want to smash the innocent babies of that foreign nation against rocks.
    - 3. And that's literally the way Judah felt about its enforced stay in Babylon.
    - 4. *How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?*
- II. This business of singing *the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land* is related to our experience as Christians.
- A. You see, we Christians reside in a foreign land also.
    - 1. Jesus calls this foreign land “the world” in John 15:19. *If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.*
    - 2. The fact that Christians are strangers or aliens in the world is a point that Peter makes three times in 1 Peter.
      - a. *In 1:1 he says ...to God's elect, strangers in the*

world.

- b. In 1:17 he says, ...*live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.*
- c. And in 2:11 he says, *I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.*

3. We are aliens and strangers living in the reign of the world.

B. Now the reason we are aliens and strangers in the world is that Jesus, our king, rules over a different kingdom—he has a different reign that operates according to very different standards from the standards of the kingdom of the world.

1. It's interesting that probably the best illustration of this Christian point I can give is the Muslim community in the US.

- a. The Muslims are truly an alien group here in this nation.
  - (1) I thought about that when I saw two scarfed and long-robed women working at a store in Tulsa two weeks ago.
  - (2) They really looked alien—it seemed that they didn't belong.
- b. Muslims look different, they speak different, they worship different
- c. They belong to a different world—are part of a different kingdom.

2. Jesus speaks of the kingdom to which we Christians belong as he tells Pilate, *My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But my kingdom is from another place.*

3. Jesus identifies this *another place* in Luke 17:21 when he says, *the kingdom of God is within you*, pointing out that it is a spiritual reality.

4. Peter speaks of our special status as residents of the kingdom in 1 Peter 2:9-10, *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

C. What this says to us is that...

- 1. While we still reside in the reign of this world...
  - a. We are to live as members of the kingdom of God.
  - b. We are to live as *a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.*

2. Following this Peter gives directions for how we are to live as members of the kingdom of God while we still reside in this world. *It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as servants of God. 1 Peter 2:13-17*

III. Now our problem as we live in the world isn't the same as the one the Jews had there by the Rivers of Babylon—that those in whose reign they lived asked them for songs.

- A. Those in whose reign we live don't ask us for songs—actually our music is irrelevant to them
- B. They are so consumed with their music of consumption, pleasure, commerce, greed, sex and violence that they ignore our music.
- C. In contrast to Psalm 137, where it was the captors who wanted the captives to sing, and in contrast to modern American life which says “Keep quiet,” it is our king who wants us, and indeed, urges us to sing.
  1. Our king wants us to “Sing Songs of the Kingdom in the Midst of the Kingdom of The World.”
  2. Our king views us as ambassadors of the kingdom of God carrying the music of his kingdom into the kingdom of the world.
  3. He expects us to sing songs of the kingdom in the midst of the world.
  4. It is this expectation that we intend to study here during Lent.
    - a. Unfortunately the series will be broken up by my not being able to preach two of the Sundays.
    - b. But every sermon I preach from now through Easter is going to be looking at this topic of singing songs of the kingdom in the reign.
- D. Now there are three ways in which we can sing songs of the kingdom.
  1. First, we can sing songs of the kingdom by telling others the good news about Jesus Christ, which is often defined as preaching.
    - a. That was the description of his singing that Jesus gave in *Luke 4:18, The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind.*
    - b. As the people of Capernaum try to claim his music solely for themselves he says, *I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.*
    - c. And in *Mark 16:15*, Jesus tells the disciples, “I want you to sing too. I want you to... *Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.*”

- d. Now telling the good news about Jesus Christ *doesn't have to be a formal preaching situation.*
    - (1) It happens when we teach our children or tell a coworker.
    - (2) It doesn't take a pulpit and a microphone to sing the songs of the kingdom by speaking good news about Jesus.
  - e. We sing songs of the kingdom by telling our children, our neighbors, our friends the good news about Jesus.
2. Second, we sing songs of the kingdom by literally singing the good news.
- a. This is something we do well in the Mennonite Church.
  - b. Paul says in *Colossians 3:16*, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*
  - c. We sing songs of the kingdom by singing.
3. Now these first two ways of singing songs of the kingdom are important, but they are totally eclipsed by the third way of singing.
- a. We sing the songs of the kingdom most winsomely and most convincingly by the lives we live.
  - b. Often this isn't thought of as singing songs of the kingdom, but it is actually the most effective form of singing we've got.
  - c. It is by our lives that the good news is most graphically sung.
    - (1) People can easily ignore the words of our mouths.
      - (a) Words are cheap.
        - i) Are easy to say, especially words of love.
        - ii) They are easily packaged into beautiful songs, even though they convey a lie.
      - (b) Words can be used to make people think we are different than we are.
    - (2) It is by the lives we live that the music of the good news is most truly carried to the ears of the world.
      - (a) And that music is the music of extraordinary love, of compassion, of mercy, of peace and of grace.
      - (b) Every decision to speak softly with compassion and understanding rather than angrily letting someone know exactly how unacceptable their behavior has been is an oratorio.
      - (c) *Every check to Sonnenberg or MCC or Salvation Army or Habitat for Humanity is a symphony.*

- (d) Every decision to skip a chance to sue someone or to mediate rather than litigate is a hymn.
  - (e) Every sponsorship of a Liberian school girl is a chorus of celebration.
- (3) Although it has become a cliché, it is exactly right that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.
- (a) People don't care about the words in your mouth.
  - (b) Instead what they care about is the healing and service and caring in your hands and in your life.
  - (c) It is when they see that that they are willing to pay attention to what your mouth has to say.
- d. Peter expresses this idea of singing songs of the kingdom by the extraordinary love and compassion of the lives we live by saying, Live such good lives among the pagans that they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
- e. *Jesus expresses the idea of singing in the reign by saying, Let your light shine before people, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*
- f. And Paul calls on us to sing kingdom songs when he says, We pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work.
- g. It is by this means that we most effectively sing the songs of the kingdom.
- E. I want us to notice two biblical examples of this kind of singing.
1. *Now the classic example of singing by living is Dorcas in Acts 9.*
    - a. *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha, or Dorcas, who was always doing good and helping the poor.*
    - b. *When she died all the widows (showed Peter) the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.*
    - c. *Those robes and these clothes were the music of Dorcas.*

- d. She had been singing the songs of the kingdom with her hands.
- e. This image reminds me of Julia's coat project last summer and fall.
- 2. And we see all three forms of singing the good news of Jesus in the story of Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail *in Acts 16:25-32*.
  - a. First, they sang by telling the good news of Jesus to the Philippians
  - b. Second, they sang by singing, and in very extreme circumstances. Severely wounded from flogging, their feet in stocks, wracked with pain, they *were praying and singing hymns to God* at midnight.
  - c. Third, they sang by showing extraordinary love, compassion and understanding as things went bad for the jailor.
    - (1) They kept him from killing himself after the earthquake.
    - (2) Rather than responding with bitterness for how they had been treated, they responded with forgiveness and understanding and *spoke the word of the Lord to him*.
    - (3) Having heard the song they sang with their lives, the jailor was ready to hear the words from their mouths.
    - (4) They turned an enemy into a friend and a Christian because they sang the love of God by their behavior in the midst of the reign of this world.

IV. Although 1 Peter hadn't been written yet, they *silenced the ignorant talk of foolish men by doing good*.

- A. They sang the music of the kingdom in the midst of the reign of this world.
- B. We too need to sing the music of the kingdom in the midst of the reign of this world.
  - 1. We do it by telling the good news.
  - 2. We do it by singing the good news.
  - 3. And most importantly we do it by living the good news of extraordinary love, compassion, mercy and kindness.
- C. I'd like to invite us all to consider how well we sang in the reign last week by turning to the scale in the bulletin.
  - 1. 1—I have to confess my behavior sounded more like the music of this world than the music of the kingdom.
  - 2. 5—I did a pretty good job, but there was nothing extraordinary about my singing.
  - 3. 10—By my life, my actions and my words I sang the extraordinary love of Jesus.
  - 4. Probably most of us were right about 5—pretty good people, but nothing extraordinary.
    - a. Some of us, I fear, if we are really honest, would have to admit that our behavior tended more toward a 3, and perhaps even lower.
    - b. Some of us were leaning more in the direction of 10, but probably few of us got closer than 7.
  - 5. I want you to mentally give the concert you sang last week a ranking.
  - 6. But then, even more important than last week's concert, I want you to

think about what you plan to do this week in order to move your music up one notch in the direction of 10.

- a. What songs might you sing to move you toward 10?
- b. How might you introduce more songs of the extraordinary love of Jesus Christ as you sing in the reign this coming week?