



Take Your Harp Off the Willows

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept . . . We hung our harps upon the willows . . . For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song. . . . Saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”
(Psalm 137: 1-4 NKJ).

God’s people were depressed—and, humanly speaking, rightfully so. Their situation was gloomy. They were in a foreign land, in servitude and bondage, reaping what they had sown. They had disobeyed God; therefore, their enemies were able to conquer them and take them captive. Now, their captors wanted them to sing!

I can imagine God also saying to them—*“Sing! I too want you to sing! Right now, right where you are—you need to sing the songs of Zion!”*

Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi. They had done nothing wrong, yet they had been beaten with rods, put into the inner prison and fastened with their feet in the stocks (see Acts 16:22-24). What terrible shape they were in—backs bloody and in a dungeon! Then the story reveals something amazing: “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (v. 25).

Again, I can imagine the Holy Spirit speaking to Paul—*“Sing! Right now, right where you are—you need to sing praises to Me!”*

Have you found yourself in a tough situation, either by your own fault or unjustly treated, or any combination thereof? And now, you have hung your harp on the willows, so to speak, with no song forthcoming. Depression is lurking, you are miserable and Satan is loving it.

“It’s not a time for singing,” you say. Or, “I don’t feel like singing. You don’t know where I am and how bad things are.” I would say to you, I understand. There are times I don’t *feel* like singing, but when I start to sing in those times,

something happens. Something happens inside me. Before long, as I offer the sacrifice of praises to God, my spirit begins to lift. What was extremely difficult at first, singing, becomes easier. I begin to feel better. Depression begins to lift.

You may think I’ve lost my mind, but I’m going to tell you—“Right now, right where you are—you need to sing praises to God.” It may sound ludicrous to you, but singing praises to God moves spiritual forces. Our enemy hates it, and God loves it. In the spiritual realm, things change when God’s children praise Him.

The story in Acts 16 continues with what happened as Paul and Silas prayed and sang: “Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed” (v. 26).

We might be tempted to think: Well, that was the great Apostle Paul. He was a spiritual giant. You could expect that from him. And God did special things for Him that He won’t do for anyone else. That was then; this is now. What will God do for me in my situation?

First of all, if you will lift your head and offer the sacrifice of praise in the midst of whatever difficult—or worse—situation you may be in, God will begin to set you free from the bondage of depression. You may not feel anything the first time you do it. Maybe. If, however, you praise God every time you begin to feel down, something inside you will begin to change. God moves in us when we praise Him in the middle of depressing circumstances.

Depression can be a stronghold, but not an undefeatable one. Yes, sometimes medications are a help while we are making progress in the spiritual realm. If there is a medical issue causing the depression, medications may need to be taken indefinitely. That is important to remember. God has provided marvelous help for the human race through modern medicine. So we follow His lead and use it when necessary.

God can and does heal depression, and when He does the medical professionals will recognize there is no longer a need for medication. God's healing is obvious to everyone. We do not stop medications because we think we have been healed, but because it is obvious to everyone else that we have been healed. Healing miracles are not hidden, but are medically verifiable. When God heals a broken bone, the x-ray shows it is healed. When God heals depression, the medical profession can verify that as well.

The spiritual door for depression is opened when our circumstances and situations become overwhelming in our minds. The Israelites in Babylon were overwhelmed with their troubles. They had hung their harps on the willows. They saw no way out of their situation. Singing was the farthest thing from their minds.

My friends, that's exactly where our enemy Satan wants us. He eagerly speaks thoughts that cause our hearts and hopes to sink. He tells us nothing will ever change. He says it's hopeless and things are only going to get worse. He happily points out all the negatives of our situation, hoping we will give up, becoming of no use to God, to others or to ourselves. And yes, there are often many negatives on which we could dwell.

But I don't want to focus on negatives. I want God's best for me, which includes joy, peace, victory, happiness and freedom from depression. Don't you? And if that requires that I change my thinking and start singing in my heart praises to God, then I will do it.

Paul closed 1 Thessalonians with some instructions to his readers: "See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit" (5:15-19 NKJ).

Paul lived what he taught, and he knew the results of having learned to "rejoice always" and to give thanks in everything. Doing things God's way results in power against our enemy Satan. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote: "Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7 NKJ). Doing things God's way, such as rejoicing always, giving thanks in everything, and singing praises to God in the middle of a strange and depressing situation, is one way of submitting to God. This not only moves the hand of God to help us, but it also empowers us to resist our enemy effectively.

I encourage you, if you have hung your harp on the willows, take it once again and begin to sing. You may have to do it many times. That's normal. But it's an act of faith, and you will begin to feel the soul-changing effects if you do not give up. Praise God in the middle of your situation.

I can imagine God saying to anyone who needed this teaching today: "*Sing! Take your harp off the willows—you need to sing praises to Me! I will help you. Sing!*" **SH**

GOD'S WORD FOR TODAY

Teaching Letter 34

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