



Winter Journey: The Absence

Winter is a season of the heart as much as it is a season in the weather. John Crowe Ransom connected the two kinds of winter:

Two evils, monstrous
either one apart,
Possessed me, and were long
and loath at going;
A cry of Absence,
Absence, in the heart,
And in the wood the furious
winter blowing.

M. Marty

Background

Jerusalem Razed – 587 BCE

- Time of Jeremiah/Ezekiel
- People relocated to Babylon
- A time of exile away from their land
- A desire for homecoming

There can be no storming of the gates

- Babylon a world power
- The people are "there" (v1,2,3)
- One place cannot simply be replaced by another (see 2 Kings 18:32 – Assyrian offer to Israel)

The Psalm represents a concreteness to our faith

- My faith here and now – in this place!

A. The Voice of Yahweh's Abandonment (v1-3)

By the rivers of Babylon – there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'

Psalm 137:1-3

An Eyewitness account (v1)

- We sat down /wept
- We remembered Zion
- The power of remembering

We Hung our harps (v2-3)

- We did not play or sing when our captors desired to mock us
- A technique of oppressors to eradicate hope
- A desire to humiliate the oppressed

The People Feel the Absence of God

- Their hope is connected to God in the temple and the site of Jerusalem
- Now they are away with the enemy
- God not really absent but we feel as if he is absent

The Human Side

- The other side of the equation is how many times does God call out to us and we are absent

I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am', to a nation that did not call on my name. I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices

Isaiah 65:1-2

B. The Resolve to Say No (v4-6)

How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, **if I do not remember you**, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

Psalm 137:14-16

Trust Amidst the Gloom

- Keep trusting under the human overcast
- We will not sing songs to entertain our oppressors
- The psalmist utters a vow: "let this happen to me if I lose my resolve"
- The inability to sing and play music

I Must Continue to Remember You Now (v6)

- Not just looking back (past)
- But now I remember you in my distress

How do we do this Remembering?

- What are our funding moments in the past?
- Can I "hitch-hike a ride on the spiritual experience of another" (Marty)
- Use the spiritual help of another to help me now in my weakness

C. Strong Passion of Resistance (v7-9)

Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said, 'Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!' O daughter Babylon, you devastator!

Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

Psalm 137:7-9

A Future Remembering Invoking God's Judgement

- **Remember O Lord** (v7)
- The Edomites (neighbours who assisted Babylon)
- Remember the destruction of Jerusalem

Two Beatitudes Listed

- Happy shall those be who pay you back ... (v8)
- Happy shall those be who do to them what they did to us (v9)

Not Noble Thoughts but Honest Rage

- Note the honesty of the scriptures
- No action engaged
- But a desire for God to bring about judgement in his time (see Romans 2:5)
- In New Testament – a desire for reconciliation not vengeance – pray for our enemy (Matt. 5:38-48)

Two Cities as Symbols

- **Babylon** – a civilization that does not look to God
- **Jerusalem** – the city of God that is and is coming (Revelation 21:2-4)

We Are Not to Forget our True Home

- Even during times of felt absence
- We await a true homecoming