

Do You Have a Song?

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[0:00] Psalm 137. I invite you to turn there this morning with me. 137th Psalm. I appreciate you letting me be a little more casual than usual.

I just couldn't write how to get a jacket over this. And it's been a challenge, but God has been sufficient through all this. I did break my arm in Malawi, stepped in a hole one night, and reached out to catch myself, and it just snapped off my arm.

And so we finished up the week of ministry we had there, and we got home on Friday, and then my wife had knee replacement surgery the following Tuesday. We've kind of been a pitiful couple.

She, I'll help her into the van, and then she will buckle my seatbelt, and then we just kind of take care of each other. But God is good, and He provides for us, and I want to share with you tonight about some of the things that God is continuing to do in Malawi.

The way that He uses teams from our association and our churches and to see some of the great and exciting things that are happening there. Psalm 137, I think, is an important word for us to hear today.

[1:30] You know that God's word is always timely. It was written for a specific purpose, a specific people, in a specific need, at a specific time.

But God's word also is living, and it's alive, and it's relevant, and it is timeless. And so circumstances, even though they change, and years come and go, and people come and go, the word of God remains forever.

And the message that God has for us from Psalm 137 is as fresh and relevant and meaningful to us today as it was thousands of years ago.

And I just pray that together we will hear His voice as He speaks to us through His word. Let me ask you a question this morning as we begin. Do you have a song? Do you have a song in your heart? I'm going to show you a video of Malawians tonight, and you will watch them sing and watch them express their love for God. And there's no doubt they have a song in their heart.

[2:34] But what about you this morning? I'm not necessarily asking, do you have a favorite song? All of us may have one. But do you have that song in your heart?

That inner joy and peace and strength that resounds and sings no matter what the circumstances around you might be? I think that's an important question for us to consider this morning.

Because there are a lot of people, and there are many people who are God's people, who do not have a song in their heart. And I think that reflects upon our Heavenly Father.

And that's why it's important for us to hear His word this morning, and to see some of the challenges that His people in the past have gone through, and recognize God's call to us as we go through the challenges of our life each day, that we are to do so with a song that's in our heart.

In Psalm 137, this is a time when Israel is about to go into the last of their exile captivities. It was going to be a long, difficult time.

[3:43] They were going to be in exile from Psalm 137 until 1948, when they were reestablished as a nation. And during that time, there was going to be lots of hardships.

There was going to be lots of challenges and lots of difficulties. And as they are expressing the words of this 137th Psalm, as it expresses the feeling and the mood of the people, there is that common expression and feeling among the people, how can we live for God in the midst of these circumstances?

In a culture that has changed and turned upon us, how can we live for God? I hope you will see that there is a timely message for us in this passage this morning.

Look with me, if you will, at Psalm 137. As they are bemoaning this fact that they are going into captivity. By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.

And we hang our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there, they that carried us away captive required of us a song. And they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

[4:58] But how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? How can we sing the Lord's song in a culture that is so contrary to the very God that we are singing about?

How can we sing? It's so easy for us to lose the song that God has placed in our heart. I think there are three indicators that we have lost that song.

And that's what I want to share with you this morning. We see from God's word. We can see that when we lose that song that God has placed in our heart, that joy of knowing Him and walking with Him.

And you'll excuse me, but I get carried away with alliteration sometimes. When we lose that song, we allow discouragement to determine our demeanor.

We allow the discouragement of the times to determine our demeanor. Israel knew that this was going to be a discouraging time. They knew from history that captivity was not going to be a pleasant experience.

[6:03] They knew they were going to suffer. They knew that their lifestyle was going to change. They no longer would have some of the freedoms that they had. They knew that there was going to be hurt and heartache and difficulty.

And as they focused on what was going to happen and focused upon the changes that had already occurred and how their life was going to be impacted by that, as they focused upon those trials and those difficulties and those discouragements, it affected the whole way that they looked at life.

So much so that they said, we can't sing the songs of God anymore. Our hearts are just so broken and there's such a heaviness.

So we have hanged our harps on the willow trees. We've just kind of given up. We can't sing as we once sung and we can't do what we once did. And so we're going to allow the discouragement of this moment to determine our demeanor.

And we're just going to be frustrated and give up. How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Well, I don't have to tell you that our land has become stranger in the last several months than it's ever been before.

[7:20] We don't live in a country that I spent most of my life in. The culture changed and it changed so quickly. It was changing gradually.

But when the changes begin to snowball, they've come very quickly. And with those changes that have come into place, it would be very easy for us as God's people, who once were the favored people, once we had the high moral ground, and once we had the high legal ground, it would be very easy for us now that that moral ground and that legal ground has been taken away from us to say, how can we sing the Lord's song in this land, in these circumstances, with the changes that have happened in our culture?

How can we continue to be the people that God has called us to be? How can we continue when so much has changed and changed so quickly? We have to be careful that we don't allow discouragement of events that have taken place, that we allow them to determine our demeanor in living our life each and every day.

I may say it more than once this morning, a lot of things has changed, but what has not changed is that God is still God. And He's still on His throne. And we still are His people.

And He still has called us to serve Him with purpose and with joy and with a song in our heart.

When you look at Scripture, you see there are a lot of examples of people who lost that song in their heart.

[8:52] And there were some reasons for that. And some of that was the changing of culture around them. Some of it was just the experiences they found themselves in. You remember Elijah, that he spent that day when he had been led by God to have the showdown with the prophets of Baal.

And there they had that showdown calling for the altar, the sacrifices to be consumed first by the false gods and then by the one true God. And God consumed that sacrifice, demonstrated that He was God.

And because of that, all the false prophets of Baal were routed and they were slain. And it was a high and holy moment. There was great victory in that moment.

And Elijah celebrated in that victory. But it was just a few hours later that he got word that Jezebel was seeking him to kill him and to take his life. And because of the exhaustion of that day and because of just the pure weariness of his heart, at the end of the days, Elijah's by the river and he's just panting for breath and he's crying out to God, God, I can't go on.

It's just too great a challenge. I just can't go on. The opposition is too great and the challenges are too great. Lord, why don't you just kill me now because I just can't take another step?

[10 : 15] Well, he didn't really want that or he let Jezebel find it. What he needed was refreshment and encouragement. He had worn himself out serving God.

He had used himself up. He was an example of burnout and ministry. He was a man who had given himself serving God so faithfully and yet he had failed to take into account his own needs throughout the process of that day and he was running on empty and now he is completely empty and completely drained and he's without a song as he finds himself there exhausted.

Other examples in Scripture, there are so many. Joshua was one of those, I believe. And when Moses had passed away and now it was time to go in and possess the promised land, it was somewhat, I think, part of God's sense of humor when God told Joshua that as these people followed Moses, now they will follow you.

And Joshua probably said, well, thanks a lot. He remembered how they followed Moses. But as Joshua looked at the challenges that were before him and crossing over that river and then the giants that were still in the land and the walls of Jericho and not only those challenges but the challenges of organizing a people that had not known God or served him faithfully for many, many years, that was an overwhelming challenge and Joshua was being overwhelmed by that challenge and the way that we know that is because God spoke to him repeatedly in the first chapter of the book of Joshua is saying, Joshua, be strong, be of good courage, and don't be afraid because I am with you.

Now the only reason why God would have repeated it several times is because Joshua was not feeling strong, he was afraid, and he was forgetting that God was with him.

[12 : 13] He was losing his song in the face of overwhelming challenges. You read the book of Habakkuk, and Habakkuk is a prophet that's bemoaning the fact that the wicked seems to be winning.

That there doesn't seem to be any indication that justice is going to prevail. And in the midst of that circumstance, in the midst of that culture, Habakkuk cries out to God in the first chapter and he says, God, how long will you let the wicked prevail?

How long will you let this go on? It is so wrong, and it is so much an abomination to you. How long will you wait? And Habakkuk was losing his song because he was allowing his discouragement to determine his demeanor.

I try not to spend a lot of time on Facebook because it's not profitable, it doesn't edify, and it frustrates me a great deal. But in these recent weeks, I have been intrigued, horrified, a mixture of all of that, at the comments and the responses to Supreme Court rulings and so many other things that have happened.

And it seems like the world has just lost its grip on reality and on common sense and especially on the call of God upon the lives of His people.

[13 : 39] And we've allowed the discouragement of circumstances to determine our demeanor rather than depending upon the unchanging Word of God.

Now when Elijah found himself exhausted, what did God do? God pulled him apart for rest. God said, let me minister to you.

Let me comfort you. Let me strengthen you. Let me replenish you. Here by this river, you wait until I am finished refilling your empty tank. That's why Jesus said in the New Testament, all you who are weary and heavy laden, come to me.

And I'll give you rest. It's not just a nap that you get, but it's a rest for the soul. It's a respite from the world. That when we are being discouraged and defeated and the world is beating us down, our response is not to hang our hearts and to hang our heads and say we can't sing anymore.

Our response is to come to the feet of Jesus and say, Lord, I know that I need you more now than ever before. You replenish my heart and you restore my soul and you give me that joy and put the song back in my heart.

[14 : 58] And you will. We see that for Joshua, he heard the Word of God and he took God at His Word and he knew that wherever he went, God was with him every step along the way.

And Joshua was able to lead those people not because of who he was, but because he knew he was walking in the shadow of a great and mighty God who had already won the victory. And Habakkuk, after he struggled, saying, God, how long are you going to let the evil win? In the second chapter, he reaches out and he proclaims, I don't know how long this is going to be, but I'm going to stay faithful to God.

I'm going to stand my watch. I'm going to continue to praise Him. I'm going to continue to trust Him. I'm going to let God be the song of my heart. I don't know about you this morning.

I may be preaching more to myself than I am to you, but in the discouraging days of recent weeks, I need to be reminded that God wants to renew me and refresh me, and the song that He has placed in my heart is not to be distinguished or discouraged or defeated by any circumstances in the world. [16:09] I cannot stop singing that song because He's the one who's placed it there. Don't allow discouragement to determine your demeanor.

But another sign that that song is gone is when you allow circumstances to cancel your convictions. Again, I got carried away with alliteration. Circumstances sometimes seem to be overwhelming, and it seems like we cannot get past those.

Israel should have understood going into this captivity that the circumstances indeed were going to be difficult, but they should not have allowed those current circumstances to overshadow the convictions that they knew and they had about God who had called them to be His people.

The circumstances did not cancel those truths about God. And the circumstances that we live in and the way that our society has changed and our culture has changed, a lot of things are changing.

We haven't seen the end of those changes. We don't know what all of those changes are going to be, but that doesn't have to affect our obedience to God and our service to Him because the one thing that does not change is that God is still God and He's still on the throne and He still calls us to be His people.

[17:28] That's not going to change. We can't allow the circumstances of our life, whether they are good or bad, to cancel the convictions that we have and we hold and that we know about God.

You know that convictions are more than just beliefs. Convictions are deeper than that. Convictions are what gives us stability in all of life.

Convictions are not just what we hold, but convictions are what hold us. We hold convictions about God that are unshakable and unchanging truths because it's God Himself that has revealed those two of us.

And even though much has changed in our world in recent days, some things have not changed. And one of those is the Word of God is truth without mixture of error. And it doesn't matter what society says or how society rewrites or how they would reword or how they would try to express what the Bible says or what we are to understand.

God's Word doesn't change. It has not changed for thousands of years and it will not change. It is immutable, unchangeable. It is everlasting.

[18:43] And God's Word is truth. It is not only true. It is truth. And in a world that is changing so rapidly and when people are trying to find well where can we reach out for stability and where can we find answers, the answers are found the same place where they have always been found in that unchanging Word of God.

That is truth. That's our conviction. We have to always be mindful how can we reach a world that is lost.

And there are some things that we do need to change but we dare not change the truth of God's Word and the conviction that it is true.

Another of our convictions is the way of God and the way of God is salvation by His grace and through faith. And even that not of ourselves. It's the gift of God, not of words.

Salvation is not a matter of changing the parameters. It's not a matter of people deciding what they're going to do to come to God. Salvation is what it is. The way to God is what it is.

[19:54] There is no other way. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life and no man comes to the Father but by me. There's not any amount of legislation or any amount of public opinion or any amount of discussion is going to change that.

That is simple. The reality and the truth. There's no other way to God. And we can unapologetically say, I love you. I love you so much I don't want you to stay in that lifestyle.

I love you so much that I don't want you to follow that direction or to take those actions. I love you but I cannot change what God has set into place and God's only way of salvation is through accepting His Son as Jesus Christ and His atoning death to pay for sins on the cross.

That hasn't changed. We can't allow the circumstances of our world to change our convictions about salvation and what it means to be saved.

And that doesn't mean that we're hateful and intolerant. It just means that we believe and we trust the Word of Almighty God. that's not going to change.

[21 : 08] We can't allow circumstances to cancel our convictions about the will of God. And that is that God knows what's right and what's best.

That He is sovereign and He is going to bring about His purposes and plan. I may not understand His timing. I may not understand the way He goes about it.

I may not understand the reasons why things occur or how they occur but I don't have to understand. I just have to know the heart of my Heavenly Father loves me.

And He wants what's best for me. And sometimes that means He's going to discipline me and sometimes that means He's going to bless me. But I never have to doubt no matter what the circumstances are that I am in my Father's hand and He's going to take care of me.

I felt so stupid in Malawi. It was late at night and it was dark and I was walking on this pathway and did not know that right next to the pathway were drainage ditches that were about five feet deep and I turned a corner and stepped into that thinking I was on the pathway and fell and just reached out to grab myself and it just kind of snapped my arm off and there I was stuck in a ditch and my first thought was well that was pretty stupid.

[22 : 37] And then my second thought was I don't think I'm bleeding anywhere. And then my third thought was well how am I going to get out of the ditch? Which was not an easy thing by the way.

And then I began to think Lord why why let this happen when we have a week of ministry? Let. Why let this happen when there are so many things we have been preparing for for so long and there are ministries there are things that we need to do.

God why did you let this happen? And God just began to immediately speak to my heart and said don't worry about that. you just keep on keeping on let me handle the why.

Now I don't know why. I may never know why. But I can tell you this God's grace was sufficient. And we were able to continue on and the circumstances of that although they were troubling to me and I think even more so for the team God got us through that and it did not cancel our conviction that we were there for a reason and a purpose and God accomplished his purpose through our team while we were there.

In all the circumstances of our life it doesn't matter what those circumstances are we don't have to comprehend we don't have to understand because our conviction is that God does know and we can trust him and we can trust him regardless of what circumstances might be.

[24 : 14] I don't know what's going to happen in coming days in our country. I don't know what's going to happen I'm not the prophet or the son of a prophet but this I do know God is still in control.

And either God will guide us around troubled waters or he will see us through but he is still God and the circumstances will not change that conviction.

it is our conviction that gives us stability in the times of turbulent times and difficult times and if you do not hold on to those convictions that come from God's word then you're going to be tossed about by all of these circumstances but you don't have to be because God has given you his word upon which you can hold and base your life.

That he loves you he cares for you he's got a purpose and he's going to bring it about if you'll just put your faith and trust in him. Israel forgot that. They forgot all the things God had done in their life and all the ways he had worked all the miracles he performed they allowed their circumstances to cancel their conviction so they lost their song they hung their hearts and hung their heads and said we can't sing anymore.

Third thing they did was they allowed the rut of the routine to replace the richness of a relationship with God.

[25 : 44] Get that? They allowed the rut of a routine to replace the richness of a relationship with God. They'd become so comfortable being God's people and receiving his blessings they began to take that for granted.

They began to just assume it was always going to be so that nothing was ever going to change and so they fell into that routine and no longer were they truly worshipping God. No longer did the sacrifices mean anything.

They were just going through the motions. No longer were they encountering a holy living God face to face worshipping Him and praising Him. They were just going through the motions.

And when they allow the rut of the routine to replace that rich relationship that's when they began to be judged by God and that's when they lost their song. they may continue to sing the old songs but it was words from their lips.

There was no song coming for their heart and when the captivity came that song was taken away because they lost sight of how rich that personal relationship was with a holy God.

[26:55] And if we're not careful we will allow the same thing to happen to us. we have been very comfortable worshipping God in the land where freedoms have been guaranteed to us.

Sometimes that comfort has allowed us to just settle into a routine rather than enjoy the richness of the relationship with God.

We dare not let that song die out in our heart. They ask the question how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land and when we look at them and look at their history we might want to say well how can you not sing after all that God did?

Just remember how God had worked and continued to work in your life all the things He had done for you. How could you not sing? How could you ever let that song be taken away when God had shown Himself so mighty and so strong and God is not going to change?

How can you let that song die? And then we have to ask ourselves the same question is that song still singing forth from our heart?

[28:07] Because He's blessed us just as He had blessed His people. I am not a good singer. I've got a great voice I just have a two note range.

Other than that I'm not good. But I tell you I have grown up with the songs of God sung around me and to me and in my heart.

And I have been blessed by God He's given me the opportunity to I was the first one in my family to be able to go to college. I was the first one to graduate opportunity to go beyond that and get other degrees and have enjoyed those opportunities.

And God has blessed me far beyond measure. But with all the education and with all the understanding I have gained from those years of schooling if I want to talk about grace I can talk about sovereignty of God I can talk about the soteriology of God I can do the acrostic God's riches I can talk about grace all day long but if I want to really communicate grace I'm going to say amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me I once was lost but now I'm found blind but now I see that song about the grace of God resonates in my heart I don't want to ever lose that song and we can talk about salvation and we can talk about the atoning death of Christ and all the views of that and how that's explained and how that all happened but it just comes down to a song in your heart and for me that song is what can wash it weigh my sin nothing but the blood of Jesus what can make me whole again nothing but the blood of Jesus oh precious is the flow that makes me whiter than snow no other fount I know nothing but the blood of Jesus and when we go through difficulties and times of hardship and challenge again we can talk about theological reasons for that but for me it's much more encouraging going to those times to sing songs like when peace like a river attendeth my way when sorrows like sea billows roll whatever my lot you have taught me to say it is well it is well with my soul or another one of my favorites is have faith in God when your pathway is lonely he sees and knows all the ways you have trod never alone are the least of his children have faith in God have faith in God have faith in God he's on his throne have faith in God he watches or his own he cannot fail he must prevail have faith in God have faith in

[31:11] God and I could sing you a dozen other songs actually I read them to you but those songs in my heart in the darkest of days in the most difficult of times when circumstances are closing in around me and I don't have answers and I don't see the light at the end of the tunnel it's that song in my heart that God has placed there it is that faith that's been put there by my mother and my grandmother and all the godly people who have invested themselves in me it is that song and those songs that speak to my heart and give me courage and strength in times of challenge and difficulty and when we come to days like we have had in recent weeks there's just that that desire that springs up within me wants to say Lord come quickly just come quickly

I don't see any good that's going to come of all this Lord come quickly and we can talk about the second coming and viewpoints of that and when and how and dates and times and all that but for me a real encouragement is just to hear those words that the marketplace is empty no more traffic in the street all the builders tools are silent no more time to harvest wheat busy housewives cease their labor in the courtroom no debate work on earth is all suspended as the king comes through the gate the king is coming the king is coming I just heard the trumpet sounding and now his face I see oh the king is coming the king is coming praise God he's coming for me that song in my heart gives me courage and strength and confidence that God is the king and he is coming and one day he's coming for me and for you if you put your faith and trust in me so let me end with where I started this morning do you have a song in your heart it may not be one of these that I have mentioned it may be completely different but do you have that song in your heart do you have that sense of God's presence and peace and purpose in your life have you allowed circumstances to cancel your convictions or discouragement to determine your demeanor have you have you allowed the rut of the routine to replace the rich relationship with God if so this morning God is saying to you I want to put that song back take your heart off that willow tree don't let the culture silence you don't let the circumstances around you kill that song let God sing his song in your heart I know the French.