

Hupernikao

Pick Up Your Harp And Sing!

Psalm 137, Isaiah 9 and 11

The first part of Psalm 137 was read to you earlier in the service. It was written sometime around 587 BC, not long after the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and his armies had conquered God's people in Jerusalem, which was in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Many in Jerusalem who survived the horrific invasion and destruction of the battle were forcibly taken as captives to Babylon, which is modern day Iraq. They were brought there to be intimidated and immersed in the Babylonian culture so they would forget who they were as God's people, and thus extinguish any influence they might have on others and any hope of a return to their faith in the future.

God's people were understandably frightened, heartbroken, bitter and humiliated.

(Listen to Psalm 137:1-4 again)

1 By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept

when we remembered Zion.

2 There on the poplars

we hung our harps,

3 for there our captors asked us for songs,

our tormentors demanded songs of joy;

they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

4 How can we sing the songs of the Lord

while in a foreign land?

Many of us hung our harps this week as we watched the shockingly rapid takeover of Afghanistan, and as we learned of Afghan mothers throwing their babies over barbed wire to soldiers to save them from the Taliban.

We hung our harps as we read of other countries mocking us.

Images like the following will be forever imprinted on our minds.

(Show pics about 3 seconds each)

I can't get out of my head the young female mayor outside of Kabul, Zarifa Ghafari, (Show Pic) that I showed a video of several months ago whose father had been killed by the Taliban, yet she continued to resist and had the courage to do it in spite of three attempts on her life—one which injured her badly--because, she said, of the hope given to her by the United States.

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This week after the takeover. The Taliban were already outside her home preventing her from leaving. She texted reporters that she was in her home with her husband and children waiting to be killed. As she said, *“I have nowhere to go. They will come after people like me.”*

On Wednesday it was reported a woman from the Takhar province was murdered because she wasn't wearing a burka. This was just after Taliban leaders promised opportunity for women would continue under their regime.

We hung our harps this past week out of empathy for those in Afghanistan who have stood with our country against evil and terrorism and now face a very dark, dangerous and uncertain future.

We hung our harps because of the many in our military who have sacrificed so much—including the 3200 who gave their lives to insure there would not be another 911 event in our country, and who created an environment where the people of Afghanistan—especially women and children had hope of a better life.

To all veterans and those currently in military service, I want to say we are grateful for your sacrifice. It was worth it to the Afghan people, it has provided safety for us, and we are grateful.

Kristie Daugherty Trahan who was raised in our church and whose husband John, is currently an Army Lieutenant Colonel, shared a letter a friend of hers named Kimberly Freeman Power wrote on Facebook. I want to read it.

As a military family, we are devastated at the recent events we are seeing unravel in the news. Joe deployed to Afghanistan eleven years ago, leading a battery of Artillerymen into war. He almost lost soldiers during that deployment. His soldiers' blood was shed there. They answered the calls for fire from the Infantry, Special Forces, Delta Forces and many more that can't be named. They had the unimaginable task of retrieving bodies from helicopters that had the same call signs as those who called for fire.

Afghanistan changed our family. It changed my husband, as it did for so many that went before him and those who came after him.

The 20th anniversary of September 11th is less than a month away. In some aspects, it is hard to believe it's been twenty years. The wages of this war at the twenty year price have been more costly than we'll ever know, especially for those who have an empty seat at their tables and for those who have a hollow shell of the men they sent off to war.

We're heartbroken for the Afghani people. We hurt for them. We mourn for their freedom.

And yet I am incredibly proud of the work my husband, his soldiers, our friends and family have done in Afghanistan. Their answer to the call of duty should never be diminished. Their bravery brings me to tears.

I invite you to pray for the people of Afghanistan. Pray for the women and the children. Pray for the men who are caught in the fires of this war. Pray for our American counterparts who are still there and for those who are being called to go back.

NOW is the time to pray for revival in the hearts of God's people. Pray for the salvation of those who have yet to know God. War changes everything but so does PRAYER.

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I am grateful for Kimberly Power allowing me to read her words.

I hung my harp this week, because as a spiritual exile and foreigner of this world whose ultimate citizenship is heaven as Peter and Paul say, I do not find in our political parties or government the solution to the evil that plagues our world.

Listen to the end of Psalm 137:5-9. By the way, you won't read these words in your devotional books, and I want to remind you as Dr. Dennis Tucker said to me one day over lunch: "Psalms is unique in the Bible because is written both from God to man and written from man to God."

This is certainly one of those passages that is man speaking to God.

(Listen to Psalm 137:5-9)

5 If I forget you, Jerusalem,

may my right hand forget its skill.

6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth

if I do not remember you,

if I do not consider Jerusalem

my highest joy.

7 Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did

on the day Jerusalem fell.

"Tear it down," they cried,

"tear it down to its foundations!"

8 Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction,

happy is the one who repays you

according to what you have done to us.

9 Happy is the one who seizes your infants

and dashes them against the rocks.

I am sorry I do, but after watching the Taliban take control of Afghanistan the way they did this week and considering the implications of it for our future and the future of the Afghan people, I identify with the emotion of Psalm 137. Not with every word, but with the emotion of it.

And I'm glad we can come to God honestly with our prayers—expressing what we are really feeling whether those feeling are good and right or not—they are real.

But I don't want to stay where this Psalmist is.

I don't want to be angry and bitter and hateful toward anyone—certainly not children. I don't want to be hopeless and songless.

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So, is there a word from God for us after Psalm 137 and after the kind of circumstances that inspired it? Is there a word from God to those songless, harp-hunged, mourning exiles?

There is.

And we find it in the prophecy of Isaiah who wrote it 100 years before Psalm 137 was written. Isaiah was writing to the Northern Kingdom of Israel who had been defeated by the Assyrians. God's prophetic word to them, also is a word to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It answers Psalm 137, and it is a word for us this morning.

(Read Isaiah 9:1a, 9:2-7 and 11:1-10)

God promises because of His zeal there is going to come a day when the resurrected Jesus will return and all the disappointment and betrayal and injustice of this life will be corrected--the rough places will be made plain and the crooked places made straight.

I told you last week in Romans 8 Paul created a word in Greek because there was no word that existed which expressed adequately who we are in Christ.

Nikao means victory. It is where the word Nike comes from, but that word was not strong enough to express what Paul wanted to say. So he added Huper which means *more than*.

When we are in Christ, we are super victors—we are more than conquerors regardless of what is happening in our world now because we have the certain hope of the Day that is coming for us.

But it is not enough for us to live only with the hope that is to come. With confidence of our ultimate victory, we are to live now in a way which bring about His will on earth.

Isaiah 9 and 11 and Romans 8 are all telling us to take our harps down off the trees—to pick them up again and start singing the Lord's song so that God's Kingdom will reign now for us and our children.

I was sharing this message with our staff on Tuesday, and Bryan reminded us that if you walk out into the Great Hall, there hangs a Mosaic that one of our groups that went to Israel and Jordan purchased to place there.

It shows a lion and a lamb lying down together underneath the eschatological *tree of life in the paradise of God* spoken about in Revelation 2:7.

(Pic)

It is a constant reminder of what will be true one day, and what we should be struggling to bring about inside our church and in our world now.

The reason we live in the country we do today—one that is not perfect I know—but one where there is the opportunity for men and women of all races, and a safe place for children to grow up to believe they can be anything God calls them to be is because of the influence of Christ in his people working for justice and peace.

Do you remember when Jesus was teaching his disciples and us to pray in the Gospels. He said, *This then is how you should pray:*

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Our Father in heaven. Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

So when you watch what has been happening in Afghanistan and you become frustrated and disheartened as I have been, and when you experience other disappointments because good seems to be losing and evil seems to be winning.

Hang your harp on a tree and grieve. Pray to God and tell him honestly how you are feeling. Trust that when you draw near to God in whatever shape you are (don't wait until you get it all together to come), trust that when you draw near to Him, His Spirit will draw near to you.

Don't stay in your anger and bitterness, frustration and hopelessness. Draw near to God!

Then take your hung-harp off the tree. Pick it up, play it, and sing the songs of the Lord.

We can do that no matter what is going on outside us because Christ is in us. The ultimate victory is ours--we have the hope of glory!

And we need to sing the songs of the Lord loudly and boldly so that we can offer the hope of Jesus Christ to a dark world and so that world can be transformed into his image. And we need to work for justice and God's peace to reign in our hearts and in our world.

Is Jesus Christ in you? Do you have His peace? Have you confessed your sins and given your life to following Him?

You can be characterized by hupernikao. You can be more than a conqueror through Him who loved you and gave his life for you.

Would throw the weight of your life on the Lord's side?