

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. *Hebrews 12:12-13*

REMEMBERING ZION

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged 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. How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? *Psalm 137:1-4**

It is sadly true that we often do not realize the value of something until it is taken from us. By nature we are prone to take many of the blessings we enjoy for granted. We seldom think about the worth of electricity until a storm comes and we are without power for a few days or even an hour. Water is such a needful thing in our lives but we don't give it much thought until we are engaged in some arduous task on a blistering summer day and the cooler runs dry.

Unfortunately we are exactly the same way with the spiritual blessings of GOD. Because of the innate coldness and unthankfulness of our hearts, we often do not fully realize the true blessings of HIS presence until such time as HE is pleased to hide HIS face, and the heavens become as brass and our attempts to pray seem to die upon our lips. (see Song of Sol.5:4-8)

It is because of this very bent of nature and the inborn weakness of our flesh, that we see the LORD demonstrate HIS mercy to us in bringing us many trials and dark journeys. Truly it is in our weakness that we are made strong by the power of HIS might and the display of HIS chastening hand. *"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."* (Heb 12:6-8)

We see this demonstrated in Psalm 137 which is a soliloquy on the experience of those Jews which were taken captive and brought to Babylon by Nebuzaradan, the Captain of the guard, of Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. (see II Kings 25) At the first I am sure that these Jews were horrified at the thought of being taken into slavery and their minds were occupied with nothing else. The fear of the unknown overwhelmed their thought processes. Just as when trials come upon us we are at first fearful of the outcome of those trials. Yet in HIS time GOD gives HIS people peace, and moves in them, to cast themselves upon the mercy of the LORD crying for deliverance. But those who are not the LORD's children are moved to rail against the LORD and to despise what they see as harsh punishment and are hardened in their unthankfulness and ultimately become accustomed to slavery and mistake it for freedom. (see Rev. 16:9-11)

Though it is true that the nation of Israel was taken captive as a result of their own wickedness and departure from the commandments of the LORD, yet it is also true that among that nation there was a reserved and faithful remnant (as per I Kings 19:18) who were nonetheless affected by the same trial. The LORD made mention of this principle when HE said, *"for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."* (Mat 5:45)

While the "rain" fell on all, the purpose and effect of that rain was quite different on those who were among that remnant and on those who were not. The nation in general received its just

reward for its disobedience but the same trial that was unto retribution to some was a demonstration of mercy to those upon whom the FATHER had a special love. For it was a trial designed to remind them of the tender mercies and goodness of GOD as they were brought to a proper esteem of those same blessings (which by nature are often taken for granted), by the removal of them.

The LORD's people cannot be content with the same blessings which satisfy the world. (see Mark 13:22) The rivers of Babylon, such as the Euphrates, were majestic rivers compared to the humble Jordan. Yet an afternoon of sitting beside these majestic rivers could not in any wise bring gladness to those whose minds were turned to contemplate the beauties of Zion from which they were presently separated. Nor could all of the exhortations of those who encouraged them to be happy and think positively cause them to have any enjoyment therein. (they "required of us mirth")

The (Christian) religious world has in great measure departed from the "ways of Zion" adopting the notion that the salvation of the righteous is a cooperative effort between the LORD who provides it and the men who "allow" HIM to save them. As a result they have devised all manner of devices designed to make the offence of the cross to cease and make the gospel more appealing to the flesh. They tell us that we should be delighted with the majestic modern rivers of "free willism" which they have produced. They tell us they have made great improvements over the little streams which used to slake the thirst of weary travelers headed to the celestial city. They tell us that sound doctrine is not a necessity and is even a hindrance in most cases to expanding the kingdom of GOD (as they describe it).

Yet we have hung our harps upon the willows which grow by these "rivers" of Babylon, for we cannot sing the LORD's song in a strange land even though we are exhorted to do so by the positive thinkers and those whose chief concern is building up the "kingdom" through coerced "decisions and a "gospel" which replaces the preaching of a complete atonement made by CHRIST for HIS elect, with an "atonement" which is supposedly offered for all but in reality completes the salvation of none. This is no "gospel" at all but is a mixture of grace and works.

They have denied that the LORD chose a people unto salvation, before the foundation of the world, based on nothing but HIS everlasting love for those HE has appointed as the heirs of salvation. Instead they preach that men have the power to choose to become the sons of GOD by an act of their own free will which denies the scripture which says; HIS sons, *"were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* (John 1:13) They tell us man can believe at any time by this same free will yet the scripture says, *"as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."* (Act 13:48)

They have in great measure replaced contemplative, soul searching, worship and doctrinally sound bible preaching with hootenanny's (which they call worship) and "pep talks" in order to have a broader appeal to those who hunger for entertainment with a dose of religion. Yet the harps of those who hunger for the exaltation of CHRIST alone, are hung upon the willows, as the efforts of men are emphasized and that which CHRIST has finished is made an afterthought. They delight in exalting religious leaders and performers and have little if any regard to the ministry of the saints one to another. They have made that which is to be freely and cheerfully given to the LORD (the right hand not knowing what the left is doing) a matter of duty by coercing men to bring their "tithes" into the storehouse which grows evermore extravagant and attractive to the flesh.

We weep when we remember Zion. This is that beautiful city of GOD, wherein CHRIST alone is exalted, sitting in royal state upon the throne of HIS everlasting Kingdom which is HIS by decree and purchase, having shed HIS own precious blood to redeem the subjects thereof. *"I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight."*(Psa 119:174) *"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."* (II Thess. 2:13)

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