



Union Baptist Church of Cincinnati
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MELODIES IN A STRANGE LAND Psalms 137

“They that carried us away captive required of us a song” (v. 3). The captors taunted them. They rudely and roughly demanded that they entertain them with one of Zion’s songs. “How shall we?” (v. 4). Zion’s songs were not written for entertainment. How shall we sing the happy songs of Zion when we are in the power of the enemy, away from the city that we love, the sanctuary which is our spiritual home?

During my pastorates in Georgia in the late twenties and early thirties, we had a “good” fellowship with the pastors of the First Baptist Church. They would visit our congregation periodically and preach. Members of their congregations would ask us to sing some of the Negro spirituals.

I would consent with great reluctance because I knew that Negro spirituals were not written or remembered for entertainment purposes. Many of the Negro spirituals were trying to say something in the field which they could not say at the “big house.” “Everybody Talkin’ ‘Bout Heaven Ain’t Going There,” ‘I Want to Be Ready to Walk in Jerusalem Just Like John,” ‘I’m Going to Tell God How You Treat Me,” “We Shall Overcome,” “I’m Trampling.”

The Negro spiritual was singing what they could not say. Their desperation, despair, hopes, dreams, aspirations, and faith were voiced in fields, shacks, and brush arbors. They were not intended for the entertainment of the captors of our culture.

“What really constitutes a strange land? Is it geographical, transportation, migration? Is it physical? Strange lands emerge about us without a change of address.

I go back to the rural community where I was born and cannot find my way around. Roads have been changed, buildings have been demolished, village stores have vanished, families have died or moved away. My old community is a strange land.

In most of our metropolitan cities we are captives in a strange land of eccentric, erratic, odd, psychotic, unfamiliar people. They have a language and behavior contrary to ours. Christians are pressured to adjust to the sound of a foreign drumbeat. Christians are requested to sing their songs to an alien culture.

Sometimes a strange land emerges in families. Love and affection escape. Communication breaks down. Children are mum at the dinner table and reluctant to share their experiences and problems with the family. There is no prayer around the table...no reading of the Bible...no worship in the church together. The climate becomes frigid.

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Matthew 28:18 – 20





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Maybe there are no physical or verbal fights, but a home, which was once warm, full of laughter and caring, has become a cold strange land. **The love of Jesus can rekindle the embers of a dying flame in hearts and homes.**

“Our songs may not be suited to a choir or a professional chorus. They may not be in a church or temple. They may be in a lonely apartment, basement, on a farm, in a factory, a hospital room, an office, in the air, on land, or on sea. The soul has a song for all of life’s situations.

When our Lord and his disciples had finished the supper in the upper room, the record states in Matthew 26:30, “When they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”

It was a terribly bleak night. There was tension and bitterness in the capital city. His disciples were in great fear. The Lord had made some gloomy remarks about his impending death. A mob was forming to trap him in the garden, but they went out sing into the dark, treacherous night. Jesus knew that he had a rendezvous at Calvary, but he went out inspired by a hymn.”

Dry your tears, Israel. Lift your harps from the willows, seal your gloom with gladness, for God has a new song for your circumstances. “Thank God and take courage.” AMEN

Your sojourn in Babylon is to test the fiber of your faith. God has testing experiences for all believers. There are strange lands all through life which are designed to discipline people who become apathetic, indolent, and indifferent. Some of the most seasoned saints of history were disciplined in difficult circumstances.

The most interesting statement in the credentials of Ezekiel is “I sat where they sat” (Ezek. 3:15). I was a victim of the captivity. I shared the tears of a weeping nation. I felt the memories that “blessed and burned.”

Babylon is not with us anymore, but Babylonian experiences and circumstances still linger in our world. If you have not, been captive, gird your soul and tune your harp, for there is a strange land waiting in the wings. The grace of God supports the faithful in strange territory and through troubled waters.

George Keith affirmed in 1787:

**“When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.” Amen**

Journeying Through a Jungle - By Rev. Dr. Sandy F. Ray (1898-1979)

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