

November 16, 2014
Saints Triumphant

"Saints of God, You Will Triumph"

ISAIAH 52:1-6

Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. ² Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion. ³ For this is what the LORD says: "You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed." ⁴ For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "At first my people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them. ⁵ "And now what do I have here?" declares the LORD. "For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock," declares the LORD. "And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed. ⁶ Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I." reigns!"

What is it about this picture of a migrant family from the 1930's that deeply touches our emotions and feelings? This iconic picture was taken in 1936 here in Nipomo during the great depression. The mother of the children appears to have lost hope as was the case with other migrant workers of this time in our nation's history.

Here is another picture, actually a painting of another family that appears to have lost hope. This family is Jewish. They are sitting on the banks of the river Babylon. The father with the beard has chains on his ankles. His wife looks off in the distance. The daughter hangs her head. The harp they use for singing lies in the dust. They are God's people far from their homeland in Israel and the city of Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord.

We can relate to these pictures because there are moments in life when we lose sight of the triumph and victory that is ours as saints of God washed clean by the blood of Jesus. This morning we want to listen to what the prophet Isaiah says to people who have lost their hope. We want to apply these words to our lives. We want the Lord to tell us that no matter how difficult life may be for us we are saints of God who will triumph.

Less than triumphant

There are those days when we find it difficult to sing the words of Psalm 118, "This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it." That certainly was true of God's people living as captured slaves in the land of Babylon. The Lord tells them not to be depressed. "Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem the holy city." Instead of sitting in the dust in sackcloth and ashes, the Lord wants his people to put on their best clothes and get ready for him to come and deliver them. As saints triumphant washed by the blood of the Lamb we can look in the mirror and greet each new day saying triumphantly, "I am clothed with Christ's righteousness ready to meet him when he returns and ready to meet the challenges of this life armed in his strength."

If ever there were people who had reason to feel less than triumphant it was these people living in the land of Babylon. The Lord says to them, "Shake off your dust; rise and sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion." Their enemies made them sit in the dust with chains on their necks. Some days it seemed like the Lord had forgotten them. Listen to their sad cry from Isaiah 49, "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." Then the Lord said to his people, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

Their enemies taunted them and ridiculed them. The Lord says in verse 5, "For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock... All day long my name is constantly blasphemed." The Lord is not exaggerating. The Lord never exaggerates. The Babylonians blasphemed the name of the Lord. Listen to how God's people describe the taunting they endured as recorded for us in Psalm 137, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'" The songs that were sung in the temple of the Lord by large numbers of people were known throughout the world. How could these people play their harps and sing great freedom songs when they were slaves in Babylon? They lost their hope. No loud hallelujahs and shouts of praise to the Lord came from their lips.

A thirteen year old girl did not want to go to school. Even though she was pretty and fun and smart, she did not want to face those girls in her class who were teasing her and tormenting her and making her life miserable. They convinced her she was worthless. No one likes to be told they are ugly and worthless.

I don't have to go to classes and worry about someone making fun of me. I don't have to worry about stepping out of my car when I come to this church and hearing someone mock me and ridicule me and call me dirty names. Yet, I face an enemy who is the ultimate bully. Every day Satan tries to take the song out of my heart, and wipe the smile off my face, and take the spring out of my step. He not only accuses me before God's throne day and night for the sins I have committed, he loves to have me glom on to troubles and concerns and forget how victorious I am in Christ Jesus my Savior. Satan never wants me to remember the words of Jeremiah the prophet, "Your mercies are new to us every morning, great is your faithfulness."

More than triumphant

So what does the Lord do for people who are less than triumphant in their singing of praises to the Lord for all his blessings? He tells them how he is going to give them victory and make them triumph over their enemies. Verse 3, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed.'" These people were hauled away as slaves into Babylon for nothing. Their captors paid nothing for them. What would it cost them to be free and come home? Would they have to come up with thousands of dollars per person to be set free? Would they have to work hard of a number of years? Would they have to lose many lives in battle? No, the Lord says just as they were taken away for nothing they would miraculously be redeemed and sent home for nothing, absolutely nothing, nada, zero, zilch.

Do you remember how the Lord sent his people home to Jerusalem and freed them from their slavery in Babylon? He raised up a man named Cyrus who conquered the great nation of Babylon almost overnight. In fact in Isaiah 44 the Lord says that Cyrus was his shepherd who would deliver Israel. Here are the words the Lord spoke about Cyrus, "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.'" Cyrus even provided money to help rebuild the city of Jerusalem and sent his troops to protect the people as they returned to Jerusalem.

This coming week we will have another Bible time for the children in the Transitional Shelter. Our lesson this week will be on how God delivered his people from Egyptians by taking them through the waters of the Red Sea. How amazing it must have been to see God's deliverance first hand in the walls of water that rose up on the right and on the left. How amazing it must have been to see God destroy the army of the Egyptians. Here is a slide that we will be using to show the joy on the faces of the people as they celebrated in song and dancing and music how God delivered them. Can't you see God's people picking up their harps and singing again as they return home to Jerusalem? The Lord says in verse 6, "Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I."

When we hear about this amazing deliverance that the Lord accomplished through Cyrus and how it cost nothing, or when we think about how the Lord delivered his people at the Red Sea and it cost nothing, how can we not think about the greater deliverance the Lord has done for us through our Lord and Savior Jesus that also cost nothing.

We are born into this world enslaved by sin. We struggle in this life to avoid sin and still it finds its way into our lives and puts us under God's wrath. It is easy to see people all around us who are so enslaved by the love and passion for things of this life they hardly ever think about the God who has given them these blessings and even gave them his Son to provide them with eternal life. But then we look into our hearts and see how enslaved we have become to thinking way too much about things of this life. We don't always seek God's kingdom first as Jesus asked us today. So what does our God do for people enslaved by sin? He comes and delivers them free of charge through by redeeming them and freeing them through the blood of his Son.

Here is how this redemption is described in 1 Peter chapter 1: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

Someday in the future we will gather as saints triumphant around the throne of the Lamb in heaven. Here is how John describes that great scene in the Revelation. "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing around the throne and in front of the Lamb." He sees them with palm branches in their hands and he hears them crying out in a loud voice this amazing song of triumph, "Salvation belongs to the our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." Salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb. God holds our great deliverance in his hands and he gives this deliverance to us freely and without charge just as he did with his captives in Babylon.

What challenges will you face as you begin a new day tomorrow or as you drive home from this worship service? What will you see when you wake up in the morning and look into the mirror? You will see a saint of God washed freely of sin by the blood of Jesus. You will see someone destined to live forever before the throne of the Lamb. You will also see someone who can say with confidence, "I know the Lord will rescue me from my struggles in life just as he did his Old Testament people." With the Apostle Paul we can confidently say, "No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Saints of God you will triumph. Amen.