



## I Will Sing

We thank God for the opportunity to stand once more and proclaim His word.

### **Psalm Number 137:1-9**

**1** By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down and wept, When we remembered Zion. **2** Upon the willows in the midst of it We hung our harps. **3** For there our captors demanded of us songs, And our tormentors mirth, {saying,} "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." **4** How can we sing the LORD'S song In a foreign land?

Now, that's not an AMEN scripture, is it? That's pretty depressing. But that's not where I'm coming from. Tonight I want to be a little contrary. See, I know a people who have sung songs of Zion in a foreign land. I know a people who refused to sit down and weep. To be a people of the Diaspora is to always be estranged from home. To always be looking back and yearning for what once was.

My mother sang when things got bad. I do it too. AlIye knows when I'm sad, or working something out in my spirit, because I start to sing. I usually start with this old song I remember from Hempstead, Texas. Oh Lord have mercy. . . I sing it slow, and I sing while I wash the dishes, or do the laundry, or while I'm cleaning. I don't know what I'm thinking. I just am. And then, I might start to sing, "I need thee every hour. By the time I get to Blessed Assurance, I know I'm on my way to being alright.

This singing may sound sad, but this is my profound expression of hope in the midst of deprivation and trial. This is my way of making it through. This is my way of holding on, and it's been my people's way of holding on.

We sing about holding on until our change comes. For Africans born in America, we have held on through kidnap, the middle passage, the peculiar institution of slavery, reconstruction, the black codes, jim crow, civil rights, and now what we call the "post-modern" age. But through it all, we have held on to the song.

You see, we hold on to the song, even though sometimes we're so hurt we can barely get it out. We search for words but we cannot even articulate them because in the moment of despair, we must remind ourselves of the goodness of God.

### **II Corinthians 4:8-9**

**We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;**

We simply cannot, so we have to borrow the songs that we grew up with, the songs our mothers sang. We may not be able to speak but we can barely sing, haltingly, sometimes more moaning than singing, but sing we do. We don't give up, we don't give in. We never have. We are not



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that kind of people. Even when we are overwhelmed by the harshness of life, we hold on to that song in the midst of suffering and pain. Langston Hughes' poem, The Negro Mother speaks of this phenomenon:

I am the one who labored as a slave,  
Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave --  
Children sold away from me, husband sold, too.  
No safety, no love, no respect was I due.

Three hundred years in the deepest South:  
But God put a song and a prayer in my mouth.

If God puts a song in your mouth, what else can you do but sing? What are the other options? Our people could have hung their harps and refused to sing, but we remembered God. We could have cursed the darkness, but we remembered God. We chose the light, and we blessed the light. I hope and pray that each of us will choose to bless the light!

God is for us. God is with us. God is not only at the heart of things, but He is the heart of things. He is for us and with us, and we will get through. That is the point. That's why we sing.

The road ahead is not going to be easy. The task is daunting. The journey will be long and it will be painful. Let there be no mistake about it. We can choose not to let our fear overwhelm us, not to let our grief paralyze us, not to let our fury consume us. We can choose not to give a disease the power to intimidate our lives.

But there are so many orphaned children, so many young people, so many families to be consoled. So much guilt, hurt, and shame. What can we do in the face of such awful pain?

We hold them in our arms.

We cry with them. and

when they fall,

we pick them up.

We help them put one foot in front of the other.

We help them to take one day at a time.



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As individuals and as God's church,

We deal frankly with our children about sex.  
Not only in our talk, but in our actions.

We deal with our lack of responsibility.

We deal with our lack of hospitality.

We develop a sense of urgency.

We become accountable to future generations or we fail them. And we cannot fail them.

When we think about the magnitude of the losses our community has sustained, we shall be tempted to allow our fear, our grief, and our fury to get the best of us.

Just yesterday, Lana and I were downtown, and a young woman pushing a baby carriage stopped to talk about what she is going through. She said she'd been tested for HIV six times in one year, but she was o.k. that she's not using anymore. I looked down at her beautiful two-year-old daughter and I thought, Lord, thank you for sparing this child's life. Then I looked at her mother, and I thanked God for sparing her life, too. Church, we must do more.

My brothers and sisters, the opposite of love is not hate but fear, and I am sick and tired of scared Christians.

We must, not only hold on to our song, but we must reach out and help others find their song.

We must hold onto our hope, but we must reach out and help others find their hope.

We must hold onto the light, and help others find their light. Stand with me as you are

Able, and repeat after me:

We shall not be afraid.

We shall be strong.

We shall be courageous.

We shall be compassionate.

We shall overcome.

We shall find the wisdom.



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We shall find the grace that the urgency of the hour requires.

And the church said: *Amen.*