

07.12.2019 WORSHIPPING THE LORD

“And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: ‘For He is good, for His mercy endures forever toward Israel’ ” Ezra 3:11

This week we look at how the returning Jews celebrated the completion of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. They celebrated in worship. The Bible tells us that:

1. They purified themselves
2. They sang and praised God.
3. They offered sacrifices.
4. They rejoiced.

At the laying of the foundation of the Temple (Ezra 3:8-13):

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: “For He is good, for His mercy endures forever toward Israel.” Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. Ezra 3:10, 11

The people praised and thanked God ‘with a great shout’ (it was not half-hearted praise) when the foundation of the Temple was laid.

At the Completion of the Temple (Ezra 6:13-22):

Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God...

The next month was Passover. The people purified themselves and then celebrated the Passover (Ezra 6:19-22).

And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD made them joyful (Ezra 6:22)

At the Completion of the Wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12):

1. The Gathering of the Levites

Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps (12:27)

2. The Purification of Priests, Levites, People, the Wall and Gates.

Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall. (12:30)

3. Praise and Thanksgiving

So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs. One went to the right hand on the wall toward the Refuse Gate. After them went Hoshaiiah and half of the leaders of Judah... The other thanksgiving choir went the opposite way, and I was behind them with half of the people on the wall... (12:31, 32, 38)

So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, likewise I and the half of the rulers with me; and the priests... The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director (12:40-42)

4. Sacrifices

Also that day they offered great sacrifices... (12:43)

5. Great Rejoicing

They rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off (12:43).

Relevance for us today:

God is gathering a people unto Himself today – spiritual Israel. We are all invited to come to Him (Matthew 11:28-30). In His kingdom, we are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). We are also to be a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5). We are to recognise that that we have been cleansed by the blood of Christ shed for us at Calvary. The purpose of God for man is holiness and righteousness, so we offer ourselves to Him daily as a living sacrifice, so that He may refine us and make us holy and righteous. We no longer need to offer animal sacrifices, for Jesus the Lamb of God is slain for us. The sacrifices God requires of us today are the sacrifices of praise and the daily surrender of ourselves to Him. We praise and thank God for His abundant grace towards us. God rejoices over His people and we rejoice with Him. But our rejoicing today will be far surpassed by our rejoicing on that day when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord. We will be glad and rejoice for the marriage supper of the Lamb is come (Revelation 19:6-8).

While we wait for that day, we are to fulfil our role on earth as members of the royal priesthood. We are to tell men and women of Jesus, the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world – the only one who can purify from stain of sin. We are to call them to be reconciled to the God who has reconciled all mankind to Himself through the death of His Son (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be...Genesis 49:10

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:4, 5.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 1 Peter 2:9, 10

And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Malachi 3:3

Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Titus 2:14

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, [d]giving thanks to His name. Hebrews 13:15

Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Psalm 107:8

The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous. Psalm 118:14, 15

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe... For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Philippians 3:1, 3

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. Isaiah 61:10

And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Isaiah 25:9

Conclusion:

Can we be both reverent and joyful in our worship? Both reverence and joy are essential to worship. We are reverent and give God the glory due His name. He is Jehovah and we are but miserable sinners. We revere Him because He, the great and mighty and righteous God has chosen to look upon us sinners and reconcile us to Himself. Through His Son, He has set us free from the captivity of sin (John 8:32, 36). This is the reason for our reverence and joy. Joy without an understanding that our joy comes from the Lord and what He has done for us becomes only entertainment. Reverence without joy becomes a weary round of worshipping God without experiencing the joy of salvation and the joy of heaven.

Many of the Jews in Jesus' time were reverent without joy. They refused to rejoice that Messiah was in their midst. Jesus Himself referred to this:

"But to what shall I liken this generation?

It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying:

'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;

We mourned to you, and you did not lament.'

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a wine drinker, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" Matthew 11:16-19

We need to be taught by the Holy Spirit how to serve God with reverence and with joy. If we do not learn this from the Spirit, our own thinking will always lead us to one extreme or the other.

Both our reverence and our joy should be a response to the goodness and mercy of God.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Hebrews 12:28

Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all the earth!

Serve the LORD with gladness;

Come before His presence with singing.

Know that the LORD, He is God;

It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;

We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,

And into His courts with praise.

Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

For the LORD is good;

His mercy is everlasting,

And His truth endures to all generations. Psalm 100

Additional Note:

WORSHIP AND SONG AND PRAISE

The praise and worship described in Nehemiah and Ezra are based on the model laid down by King David.

Song and praise are an integral part of worship. We worship a God who is worthy and we are called to declare His praise in joyful song. But every offering of worship to God must proceed from God Himself and not from our own desires and our natural talents.

Music is one of the greatest gifts that God has given to man. It has the power to move hearts and change lives when used in the service of God. The redeemed will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb when they reach heaven, and eternal life will be an everlasting paean of praise to the God who has loved us and redeemed us.

Unfortunately, however, we live in a fallen world. And Satan, who as Lucifer was director of the angel choirs, knows well how to teach fallen mankind to misuse music. It is therefore imperative that our offerings of music, song and praise are produced by the Holy Spirit who in-dwells our hearts and not what we think is right and enjoyable in our own eyes (Deut 12:8).

Music and Song in Worship

God has laid down principles in His Word about music and song in worship. There are 2 common models described - one is called the Theological model of worship and the second is called the Artistic Model.

The Theological model of Christian music (The MESSAGE of our music)

The first priority of all Christian music is its Message.

*Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, **who should prophesy** with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals... Of Jeduthun...**who prophesied** with a harp to give thanks and to praise the LORD... 2 CHRONICLES 25:1, 3*

The Message must have the authority of God.

All these were under the direction of their father for the music in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps, for the service of the house of God. And their fathers Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the authority of the king. 2 Chronicles 25:6

In Luke 2:14 we find the first Christmas carol ever sung. It was sung by angels. And though we do not know the exact date when it was sung, we can all join in the angels' song.

There are 3 principles laid down here:

1. Glory to God
2. Peace on Earth
3. Among men, Goodwill

Glory to God

This must be the foremost theme of all Church music, indeed all the music of those who call themselves Christians. In Isaiah 6 we see the seraphim continually proclaiming the holiness and glory of God. In Revelation 4, 5 and 7, they are joined by the redeemed.

On earth, Peace

The second principle of church music is that it is Christ-centred.

Church music must describe the great themes of salvation and our response to it. We have peace with God, the assurance of salvation, and can give glory to Him because of the work of Christ.

The difference between the first and second principle of Christian music is that in the first we offer praise for what **God is** – the great I AM. In the second we offer praise for what **God does**– His mighty work of creation, redemption and re-

creation (Eph 2:1-10), and we commit our lives to Him that He may both begin and finish His work in us (Phil 1:6 Heb 12:1,2 Rom 12:1,2).

Among men, Goodwill

The third principle of church music is that it will describe the relationship of Christians to humanity. Again, this is the result of knowing God and His great love to us, which leads us in turn to bestow it to others (John 15:12). This also includes our commitment to share the love of God with our fellow men.

The Artistic Model – the music ministry of David

Some principles:

1. Music ministry must *support* the preaching ministry, not become a substitute for preaching. This is a Biblical principle.
2. Music is a vehicle to carry the message of the gospel. Music and musical instruments must never overpower the message. When a piece of Christian music is sung either by a soloist, a small group or a choir, the accompanying music must not overpower the message of the singer.
3. Church music is never an end in itself. At church services, Christians are invited to participate in thanksgiving and praise and to respond to the gospel, God's gracious gift of salvation in Christ Jesus.
4. All music, whether instrumental or choral, must fulfil the 3 goals of Christian music – God-centred music which gives glory to God, describes the salvation offered to us in Christ and our response to the gospel in our lives and our relationships with the rest of humankind.

The most detailed description we have in the Bible of music ministry is that of King David's organisation of music ministry for the sanctuary services. Details are found in 1 Chronicles 15:16-24, 1 Chronicles 16:4-6, 37, 42; 1 Chronicles 25:1-7. These were followed by later generations, e.g. Hezekiah, Nehemiah and Ezra.

1. It was organised (see the above verses).
2. It was a ministry conducted by Levites.

We are all a kingdom of priests and a holy priesthood devoted to the service of God.

The Holy Spirit gives gifts and those who are given the gift of music should be chosen for, and devote themselves to the worship of God in music. It is important to remember that talents and gifts of the Spirit are NOT synonymous. We may be born with natural talents, but unless these talents are given to God for Him *to use or not as He pleases*, they are worthless. The church suffers much because of naturally talented members who have not dedicated either themselves or their talents to God.

3. The musicians were mature, musically trained Levites (1 Chronicles 15:16-22; 25:7)

Musicians should be musically trained and have a basic understanding of the various forms of music used in Christian services. This is important since EDUCATION of members and younger musicians is an integral part of the job. If ever there was a time for mature church musicians, it is now. Much of the misunderstanding between traditional Western classical church music and more contemporary forms of music used in the church arises from a lack of musicians with training not only in musicianship, but in the history of music and development of various musical styles over the centuries. Many musicians are not even aware of how hymns have changed over the

centuries – the earliest hymns were God-centred i.e. hymn writers call us to look upon the wonderful work of God in creation, redemption and re-creation and respond in praise, thanksgiving and consecration. Some of the greatest theology of Christianity is found in the hymns of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. Over the past century, the message has often been man-centred rather than God-centred i.e. the emphasis has been on our experience.

If we had trained musicians who are mature in their faith, they would be able to educate and guide members about music appropriate for church programmes. They would know where to be patient and allow musical tastes to develop in members who are still young in the faith but genuinely devoted to Christ and yet be firm in not allowing music that is inappropriate for use in worship, while having the ability to explain *why* the music is inappropriate.

4. Spiritual preparation was as important as music preparation, so ministry was inspired by the Holy Spirit 1 Chronicles 25:1.

Preparation for music in the church service is necessary. This is, first of all, a spiritual work, asking the Holy Spirit to guide the choice of music. You will be amazed at how you will be led to choose music that reflects the theme of worship for the day. This is followed by physical preparation - practising the music that is meant for instrumental meditation and the special music. If you are still a 'learner' musician, it is a good idea to ask the minister ahead of time for the hymns so you can practise them before the services.

This does not mean that there is no room for spontaneity in church music. However, a good 'rule of thumb' is to ask yourself how much you would prepare for a concert or presentation before important guests and then ask yourself if the God of the Universe deserves any less preparation before we come into His presence.

5. The ministry was a **continual ministry** of thanks and praise 1 Chronicles 9:33,34 and 16:4

Worship is not confined to public worship. All of life must be a continual offering of praise and thanks to God. This is because '**God's mercy endures forever**' 1 Chronicles 16:41.

6. It is a *ministry* of music, not a *performance* of music. 1 Chronicles 16:4, 37; 1 Chronicles 6:31-33; 2 Chronicles 8:14; 23:6; 31:2.
7. Music is never an end in itself – it draws attention to, and gives glory to the work of Christ. 2 Chronicles 29:20-30

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD; and to sing praises to Thy Name, O Most High. Psalm 92:1

I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. Psalm 104:33

I will sing unto the LORD, for He has dealt bountifully with me. Psalm 13:6

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Colossians 3:16

A New Song

Many times in the Bible we read this phrase 'a new song'. What do we learn from this expression?

1. It is a song that only the redeemed can sing, for it is a song of salvation.

Unbelievers do not wish to sing it. Angels cannot sing it, for they have not experienced it. (The angels sang for joy at Creation- see Job 38:7, and sing and rejoice whenever a sinner repents and returns to God – Luke 15:7, 9. But the angels cannot sing the song of redemption).

2. It is a song of experience; the experience of salvation. Every aspect of salvation that becomes real in our life, repentance, forgiveness, conversion, justification, sanctification, deliverance from evil, and ultimately glorification, is a reason for a new song. Ultimately, every new song we sing is a song of praise to our Creator and Redeemer. Even in heaven, we shall sing a new song, for the new experience of salvation consummated. It is the song that recognises the God of the Covenant, who is faithful to keep His unconditional promise of salvation to all who believe.
3. It is a song that arises out of a broken and contrite heart. It is only those who recognise their inherent sinfulness and unworthiness and come to God seeking His salvation, who can rejoice and sing of His marvellous grace. *'O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart— these, O God, You will not despise'. Psalm 51:15-17*

Sing to Him a new song; play skilfully with a shout of joy. For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth. Psalm 33:3, 4

He has put a new song in my mouth— Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD. Psalm 40:3 (note that it is God who gives us the song; when He gives the song, it brings men to God).

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth." Rev 5:9, 10

They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. Revelation 14:3
