

Shout to God with the Voice of Triumph!

Call to Worship: Psalm 33:1-5

Hymn #218- *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name!*

1st Scripture: Ephesians 5:1-21

Hymn Insert- *Here I am to Worship*

2nd Scripture: Psalm 47

Hymn #13- *O Worship the King!*

Introduction:

To say that there has been no small debate about the substance of worship, particularly in regard to the singing of hymns, throughout all of church history, is by far, no understatement. Even within the Reformed Baptist (formerly "Particular Baptist") denomination, there has been a wide variety of opinions concerning what style of music ought to be permitted and used in the worship service. Questions, such as, "Should instruments be allowed in the worship service, and if so, which ones," and "Should songs be permitted outside of the inspired Psalms," and "What is an appropriate limitation for musical tempo" and "What about choirs and/or special music," and "What about contemporary music,"...etc, have all filled the time slot for many a debate, even among the reformed, who hold to the "Regulative Principle of Worship."

In fact, in the 1670's, a great controversy erupted among the Particular Baptists, concerning whether or not hymns ought to be used in the worship service. This controversy, labelled the "singing controversy," actually led to many a church split, and no small uproar was caused by it. "Benjamin Keach, a London pastor [and a signer of our confession of faith], led his church to sing a hymn after the Lord's Supper, and within a few years they were also singing during regular worship services." This helped spark the controversy, and, "in 1691, Keach published the first Baptist hymnal, *Spiritual Melody*, a collection of over three hundred hymns."

Needless to say, even up to the present day; even in our association (ARBCA), there are a broad spectrum of opinions surrounding the issue of what is musically appropriate in the worship service (although, there tends to be more of a spirit of grace, charity and respect among our churches, regarding such differences).

For several years now, I can say that I have had the strong desire to address this matter, here in our church, as I believe that it is indeed important, and something we ought to wrestle with, as we continually strive to worship God in a way that is most pleasing to Him, in accordance with His Word. You see, there are two wrong extremes that we must avoid, when considering this matter.

The first is to simply act as if our time of congregational praise in song is of minor importance; something of little relevance, as long as we fix our attention on the preaching of the Word. For, the preaching of the Word of God is that which is central, and all else is secondary and on the "fringe" at best. Now indeed, we do put a very high emphasis on preaching, and it ought to be central to our time of worship, but our time of congregational praise and singing is very significant as well, brethren, at least in the sight of God. Singing praises and giving thanks to God is a large theme in Scripture, pervading both covenants. In the Old Covenant, David had set up a levitical choir, whose priestly job, was solely focused upon continuously singing praises to God before the temple. The Psalms; that glorious hymn Book at the very heart and center of the Bible, is full of passionate singing of praise and calling out to God, all throughout their inspired texts. If they have any relevance for us today, they ought to say something significant about the importance of our present topic. In our first Scripture reading, from Ephesians 5, we found that, unlike the world that finds its heartfelt joy and passion, bound to the deceptive, temporal dumbing effects of alcohol and hard drink (see FB posts for this constant emphasis), the people of God are to be "filled with the Spirit," soberly and joyfully singing Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to one another...if we have something to be joyful about, brethren? And in Revelation, the very clear implication is that, in heaven, there is the constant sound of musical instruments and melodic praise, offered to our God and to the Lamb that was slain, by every living thing that has breath! And so, indeed, our times of congregational praise and singing are significant to God, and they ought to be so, to us.

But secondly, there is another extreme as well, isn't there? There is the danger of elevating singing to the place that it virtually eclipses the ministry of the Word, as if, *our* words to God are somehow more important than *His* Word to us. Often times, those who make congregational singing, central to the worship service, at the expense of the ministry of the Word (calling 10-15 minute fairytale homilies, preaching), probably do so, because they are more

interested in stirring up their own emotions and catering to their natural desire for self-fulfillment, as opposed to recognizing that this is all about God and His Christ; and pleasing and glorifying Him. They leave fulfilled, but it is all empty from the standpoint of God.

And so, while the second example is not commonly found among Reformers, both of these examples are in the extreme, and ought to be avoided. The overly dull, sullen and somber is equally as problematic as the overly giddy, jumpy and uncontrolled.

I. A Case for Utilizing the Psalms for Discerning God-Honoring Worship

Before entering our main text, brethren, I want to make a case for utilizing the Psalms to help discern God-honoring worship in the New Covenant church. You see, there are many who would write off particular musical practices described in the Psalms, making the claim that such practices are bound to the Old Covenant Ceremonial laws, and therefore, no longer to be practiced in the New Covenant. They would see, for example, the use of musical instruments as something akin to burning incense and offering sacrifices...etc. In fact, many of the Reformers and the Puritans would fall in the category of holding such a conviction.

Now, while I would agree that discernment has to be used when attempting to utilize the Psalms as a guide for worship; after all, there are some very clear Old Covenant ceremonial practices recorded in some of the songs, I also believe that much can be taken from the Psalms, especially concerning the nature of New Covenant worship. Let me give you several reasons for this conviction:

1) Most everyone who practices any form of congregational singing, would agree that the *content* of the Psalms would be very appropriate for use in worship (not that this is done, in fact, it ought to be done, but it is more than appropriate). Indeed, the inspired songs of the Bible, located in the very heart of the Bible, are very much meant to inspire our worship. That being the case, if you stripped out everything that specifically addressed the means and method of worship practiced in the Psalms (limiting those practices to the OC), much of the content would become superfluous and empty. Why sing about using instruments, clapping hands, shouting...etc, if the terms have no relevant meaning for us?

2) By far, the Psalms are *not* a poetic novel filled with Old Covenant ceremonial practices. By and large, you don't see Leviticus in poetry, when reading the Psalms, and most of what you do see to that end, could very easily be recognized and appreciated in the Gospel. Rather, the Psalms are given us for the very purpose of governing our praise and worship. They present us with a theology of passion, perhaps better than any other Book of Scripture. They transcend all covenants and have a way of reaching into our hearts, so that we might be brought to worship God in spirit and in truth. All of us have, in our walks of faith, related so well with the Psalms, and therefore, they ought to very much govern our style of worship and praise, as well. No, the Psalms are not poetic expressions of OC ceremonial law, but rather, they are poetic expressions of the heart in love with God [sincere worship from the heart].

3) The method and style of congregational praise, given in the Psalms, is not taken from the Books of the Law. They do not come out of the Old Covenant Law. Rather, they come out of the practice of worship, especially developed by David, when the ark was brought back to Jerusalem, after it had been lost because of the sins of Eli and his sons. It was then, that David had set up the roles of the Levitical priests, who were set apart, specifically for the purpose of offering constant praise and worship to God before the Temple. The use of instruments, and the practice of worship described in the Psalms, became the practice of Holy Spirit inspired worship for the people of Israel, as they gathered before the Temple for instruction, teaching, worship and praise. The instructions for these practices are recorded in 1 Chronicles, as a means of preparing the Babylonian exiles for returning to the land, so they could reorder the worship according to the former practice. The worship content of the Psalms, governed the life of the Old Covenant church.

4) Some would argue that musical instruments and the type of worship described in the Psalms was not permitted in the synagogue worship, and this is one reason why it did not transfer into the life of the early church, as well. I would agree with this, but I would see this as a problem that needed to be fixed.

You see, synagogue worship began, following the Babylonian exile, when the temple was first destroyed. Synagogues were used as a means of worship, when the temple was no longer in place. That said, even after the temple was rebuilt, the practice continued throughout the history of Israel. Remember as well, many Jews remained in exile, where they rebuilt their lives. The

use of the synagogue enabled them to practice their faith, less the temple sacrifices. That is one of the reasons, Chronicles was given to instruct the Israelites concerning how worship was to be done at the temple. And two key reasons that the style of worship changed from temple worship to synagogue worship (which went from instrumental singing to chanting without instruments) are as follows:

A- The religious leaders (the rabbis) began to claim that the playing of musical instruments was a form of work, especially if the instruments needed any form of tuning. And such was not to be done on the Sabbath. While the rabbis had no jurisdiction over the continuing temple worship, they did preside over the synagogues.

B- The rabbis believed that any form of joyful worship was inappropriate in light of the sorrows that were being experienced because of God's judgment upon the Israelites, who had gone into exile. Mourning was more of the appropriate atmosphere, and this carried over throughout the history of synagogue worship. It became the pattern/tradition. [See "Hosea 9:1, "Do not rejoice, O Israel, with exultation (or "merriment") like the nations." "An ear listening to songs will surely be cut off.... A song in the house means destruction is at its threshold" (Sotah 48a, as given by Liturgica.com)]. [<http://www.biblelessons.com/origins.html>]

Needless to say, such practices carried over into the life of the early church as well, which is probably why singing was virtually not even aloud in the churches for 1600+ years! Indeed, the Catholic church used instruments and sang, but they also made use of many OC practices. Obviously, this would not have gone over well with the Reformers, who were pulling away from the idolatrous practices of Rome. But, could it be that the proper use of music was shunned and rejected, at least in part, due to guilt by association, in this respect? When I look at the Psalms, Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, and David, the man after God's own heart, who even danced before the Lord in worship, I cannot help but consider this a possibility.

Brethren, for these reasons, I believe that we must throw out all pre-conceived notions, and we must, re-evaluate our doctrine of congregational praise and singing, in the very light of the Psalms. We have to stop being afraid of somehow becoming "Pentecostal"; we cannot throw out the baby with the bath water, when considering the great emotion and passion; controlled,

but great nonetheless, that ought to fill our times of praise in song! We are not talking about being "slain in the spirit" (in a Pentecostal sense), doing cart wheels down the aisles, speaking in foreign tongues, and casting out all forms of order and restraint. But yes, we ought to be able to let loose a bit; to unbind our hearts from the so-called grip of somber conservatism, and to let it flow out to God and Christ, in praise! If the Israelites had much to be thankful about in the OC, because of their redemption out of Egypt, all the more, our praise should be louder, more joyful and more passionate. Should we, in the Gospel age, lower our standard of praise? Emotion is not an OC virtue; it is a God-given human virtue, that ought to be let loose, indeed controlled, but let loose, nonetheless! There is nothing undignified or fleshly about that, brethren! There is nothing unreformed about that, brethren. And if it is unreformed, then I would gladly lose the title and pull out my heart and give it to God!

Well brethren, all of that said, let me say a few things to you, with reference to our main text this morning. I realize that I spent much time in preparation, but it was worth it, because I want this text to flow into your soul without any restraint, barring you from the very heart of the Psalms, and that which ought to be the very heart of our worship and praise.

II. Shout to God with the Voice of Triumph

Here, we find a particular Psalm that is geared toward praising God, especially for the divine protection that He provides for His people. His sovereign power, particularly displayed in the protecting and prospering of His people, against their enemies, is the underlying backdrop of this Song of praise.

Now, while there are indeed solemn Psalms of grief and sorrow, where the Psalmist (like us), pours out his heart before God, seeking His help and grace, I want you to notice the particular aura given by this Psalm, which is found in many of the other Psalms as well.

Notice how this Psalm is moving and riveting. It is loaded with excitement, and it is meant to lay hold of the heart, so as to squeeze fervent praise out of it. It is full of emotion, isn't it? [Read it again now].

Brethren, let this speak to the hearts of those who are redeemed and well protected in Christ! Let it move us to sing with great energy and force, when we praise our God together! Let your heart loose! We gather together on the Lord's Day, the first Day of the week; the Day commemorating the resurrection of our blessed Savior; our Lord and Christ died and was raised from the dead, and He has won our salvation from beginning to end...how can we sing with heads down, full of lethargic yawning, when this is what we are celebrating here each Sunday? Now, this is not Pentecostalism, which seeks to use music as a means of stirring the emotions. This is Biblical Christianity, which seems to use God's objective truth in Christ, as a means of stirring the emotions unto the praise and worship of our great and glorious God. And the means here, is not a rote process, but rather a proper reckoning of God's truth for us in Christ. The emotion ought to be inevitable! And if reformed means restraining that, then something is greatly wrong with being "reformed," brethren, or maybe we ought to "reform" more!

"Shout to God with the voice of triumph! Clap your hands, all you peoples, and shout in the victory given you in Christ!" Well, that's just OC emotion. Oh, it is? Verse 2 tells me that the reason for this shouting and clapping and exuberant rejoicing, is summed up in the greatness of God! It doesn't say, "Shout, for the animal offerings are being burned up" or "Shout, for the incense is being burnt." No, "Shout...for the Lord Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth!" This is a transcovenantal shouting. It is bound to the infinite, eternal character of God, and no one, single covenant, brethren! Do you see that? Do you feel the tempo moving here, brethren! "Well pastor, it also says to clap your hands...and you know, that just doesn't seem right and all..." "Throw out your pre-conceived notions, and look at the text!" By all means, clap your hands on this occasion. The greatness of God, in His kingly majesty warrants that! Not every song calls for it, but this one sure does. You clap your hands and jump up when your favorite player hits a base hit or the game winning home run; or when the wide receiver of your favorite football team, catches the winning touchdown pass. We clap our hands when attending the speeches of dignitaries and governing leaders. Will we not clap and rejoice with great joy in the presence of our infinite and glorious King Jesus, who has conquered on our behalf; who has won the battle and victory for us, His unworthy children? Indeed, shout aloud; clap; hold out your arms, release your praise unhindered! God has done a good work and He promises to finish it! Our enemies cannot win; they cannot rob us of our joy in Christ! They cannot and will not separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. [Lull] "Let us

love and sing and wonder, let us praise our Saviors name....He has hushed the Lord's loud thunder, He has quenched Mt Sinai's flame. He has washed us with His blood..." No! [With great joy] "Let us love..."

"God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!" Why? "For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding [not with uninformed emotions]!" "God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne..." Do you see the excitement attached to these realities, brethren? Again, these are not OC realities. These are universal applications grounded in the unchangeable glory and majesty of our God! These things ought to greatly move us! The Gospel ought to greatly move us!

[Span Psalm 5:11-12; 32:10-11; **33**; 66:1-3; Psalm 95; 98; 100; 135----etc]

III. Closing Words

Brethren, we believe in the centrality of the preached Word; we believe in a God-centered, Christ-centered ministry; we believe in the all-sovereign power of our all-sovereign, ever reigning God, but we need to work on the musical aspect of our church life, bringing it up to the par, with all that we believe about these other things. This does not mean that we get rid of the Trinity Hymnals and simply repeat very simple phrases one thousand times. This does not mean that we empty our hymns of sound doctrine. But, we have to add some tempo, even some contemporary tempo, to what we already have. Indeed, there is a place for reserved and somber singing. But, there is also a place for letting the heart explode in song, with pep and fire, with instrument and shouting, and dare I say, at times, with clapping and motion.

We want this sanctuary to ring loud with the praises of God, because brethren, our God reigns, and He is worthy to be praised, with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. We live in a country that denies the reality of God, if not in word, certainly in action. We are a country of practical atheists, at best. But *we* know the truth, brethren! We know that our God is not sitting back, overpowered by the will and power of men. No, He is indeed very active, very present, working out every last detail of His will, unto the exaltation of Christ! Let us make that known

in our congregational praise! Let us shake this room with loudness, joy, excitement, jubilation and praise! Because we really believe that God is alive, well, all-sovereign, and a glorious Redeemer and Reconciler to all who call upon Him in truth!

[Close again with Psalm 47:8-9]

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Ephesians 3:14-21