

Musical Glory: Why We Sing What We Sing – Job 38:4-7, Psalm 95, Col 3:15-17

Introduction – It has been our aim since the inception of our church to think about music and singing with God's preferences in mind and not our own first. And now, for well over 15 years, we have been going down the road of recovering the gift and art of Psalm-singing as well as looking theologically and aesthetically at God's gift of music in general. There are many that have joined us along the way that may not have heard the apologetic for why we sing what we sing. There are others, I know, who have heard the arguments – and are not convinced. And finally, there are some who may understand why we talk about beauty, music, singing and worship the way we do but frankly are having a hard time engaging in the work for any of a number of reasons.

Music in Creation – God made music in the very acts of Creation (Job 38:7). It exists at the throne of God now (Isaiah 6:3), and will forever (Rev 4:8-11). Music is a creation of God and a gift to His creation. It is one of the things that we are to take dominion over, using it to the glory of God (Psalm 33:1-3). Therefore, like learning to farm the land, build a city, lead a nation, or raise a family, creating and performing music takes skill, wisdom and practice.

Modern Assumptions vs Objective Standards – We live in a culture tainted deeply with the work of romanticism, sentimentalism, and egalitarianism, all bitter fruits of the Enlightenment. We believe the evolutionary dogma that new is always better than old. We tout feelings to be more important than fact and that all perspective in arts and aesthetics are relative (except that a traditional perspective is in fact judged as less enlightened). Now throw in one more important fact: technology has allowed us to be a culture that has the ability to listen to music more hours in a day at the least amount of expense than ever before in the history of man, while at the same time we are becoming some of the most musically illiterate and unskilled people (able to play an instrument with mastery) as this technology advances.

But what do the Scriptures teach? God has commanded us to worship Him "*in the beauty of holiness*" (1 Chron 16:29). The psalmist writes of beholding "*the beauty of the Lord*" (Psalm 27:4). We pray that beauty would rest upon us and on the work of our hands (Psalm 90:17). Philippians 4:8 tells us to meditate on things "*beautiful, lovely, and good.*" Beauty is not "in the eye of the beholder" – rather – beauty is in the eye of the Beholder, the Triune God. He is our standard.

Disciplining our Personal Tastes – Psalm 95 as an example – The word "psalms" means both "a praise in song" and "a song made with the voice" and even "to play a musical instrument" (*various lexicons*). This helps us understand that the Psalms are to be sung. They weren't made first of all to be read or studied in private. If these are God's praise songs, we learn then quite a bit about God's preferences from them. Oftentimes, we find it quite easy to sing words like Psalm 95:1-7, but not vv8-11 so much. This is not a problem with the Psalm; this is a problem with our personal tastes.

God Wants to Do Far More for Us with Music than We Prefer (Col 3:15-17) – God wants His Word to dwell in us "richly" (the word means abundantly in both quantity and quality – an abundance of something that has great value). This is a work of the Spirit to which we give ourselves to (Eph 5:18-19). The Word is to have its way with us, "teaching and admonishing one another." This is why so much of the Psalms is not language of praise to God only, but all kinds of other things. Some are strictly doctrinal or ethical (Psalm 1). Some are purely historical (Psalm 105, 106). Some are exhortations to praise (Psalm 92, 148-150). Many are war songs against the enemies of God (Psalm 68, 76). And many are deeply emotional cries to God of praise (103), or lament (88). Some Psalms teach us to sing to God when we doubt Him (13), when we must confess to Him (32, 51), and when we despair over our enemies (137). They teach us to identify with Christ in His crucifixion and resurrection (22). It goes on and on, which is why Calvin called them, "*the Anatomy of All the Parts of the Soul*," and Spurgeon called them, "*The Treasury of David*."

Musical Propriety and Wisdom – It's not simply about the words of the Psalms. We also need to discipline ourselves and our culture in the wisdom of music itself. If you hear a marching band playing, you don't expect a funeral. If you hear high, classical opera, you don't expect a nightclub. Music is teleological – styles perform certain functions, and our occasion in the worship service is unlike any other throughout the week (Heb 12:24-29); it is to be a time of solemn-rejoicing, of rejoicing with trembling, of worship with reverence and godly fear. This is why we must grow in wisdom and this is why the musicians appointed to serve in the temple were among the wisest men (1 Kings 4:31, 1 Chron 15:19). We are reaching back to the music of the Reformation, not because it was perfect and not because we want to stay only there. The musicians of the Reformation made music with a scriptural framework in mind (theologically, aesthetically, musically).

Rising to the Musical Challenge – So if music, singing, and the psalms are all gifts from God for us, then what are we to do? Acknowledge where you are and seek the Lord as to where you should grow next. Do you need to learn to read music? Do you need to learn to sing? Do you need to meditate on the Psalms? Do you need to learn to play an instrument? Do you need to sanctify your playlist? Do you need help singing around your family table? May God grant us all the ability to be a people "*singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*"