

Thank God for a Song to Sing – Colossians 3:15-17

This month we have journeyed through the epistle of Paul to the Colossians, and discovered many things we are thankful for because of Jesus.

We are thankful for the body of Christ, our church family.

We are thankful for the cross.

We are thankful for new life in Christ.

We are thankful for prayer.

And we are thankful for a song to sing.

Throughout the book of Colossians we have seen how grateful the Apostle Paul was for so many things, and we end our study with a quick look at what he has to say about music.

In their little book called “Sing!” Keith and Krystyn Getty start chapter one with these words:

“We are a singing people because it is how God created us. It is what we do.

And when we do, we’re simply joining in with what the rest of creation is doing.”¹

God created us to be singers! As a baby is being formed in the womb of his or her mother, the vocal cords are formed at around week twelve and they work perfectly before the baby is born. That is why the first signs of a safe delivery are the sounds of a baby crying. The vocal cords work!

And those vocal cords were not made just for crying, or later talking, but they were made for singing. Nothing is sweeter than the sound of little children’s voices singing a song – even if it is “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” Yesterday I heard the children sing “Jesus Loves Me” at the children’s dress up party. It was beautiful!

God put within us the ability to hear pitch, to appreciate melodies, to discern the meaning of lyrics and to be moved by music. Music engages our minds far better than words alone can. How do we know? Most of us can recite more lyrics from songs than we can quote scriptures. Put those scriptures to music and see how much easier they are to remember!

Music can take us through a whole range of emotions, from celebration to utter grief. Music can take us out of our mundane days and lift us to great heights of joy and ecstasy. Music can change our moods. This is all a gift from God, who created us to enjoy music and to sing!

“Wait a minute Pastor, have you heard me sing?” you protest. Maybe you auditioned for the choir and you were asked to be the page turner. Maybe the dog howls when you sing. But that does not matter – you were created to sing, and anyone who can talk can sing. They may not

¹ Keith and Krystyn Getty, “Sing!” (B&H Publishing Group: Nashville, 2017), p 1)

always be on pitch, and they may have the timing off, but they can sing. We tend to tease and say, "Anyone can make a joyful noise to the Lord!" And that is true!

My pastor when I was a teenager was a good pastor. He loved the people, preached the Word, and sang from the depths of his heart. Unfortunately, he seldom hit the right notes! You could see on his face that the words to the song were feeding his soul, and he was truly blessed by the music, but he was tone deaf. It was for this reason his wife led the music at the church. She knew her music and could sing on pitch! But her husband, my pastor, still knew the value of singing as a follower of Jesus.

In fact, in scripture God commands us to sing. Hear again the words of passages like Psalm 149:1:

"Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints."

There are more than four hundred references to singing in the Bible and at least fifty of those are direct commands! A church that does not encourage and allow its people to sing is violating God's own Word!

The Apostle Paul knew this and so he does not fail to point out the importance of singing to the Christians in Colossae. In the passage Xiao read for us this morning we find Paul's instruction on singing to the church. It is tied up in his attitude of thanksgiving, and starts with the call to peace in verse 15:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...

I do wonder if more Christians should focus on that verse as they think about worship. There is something known as "Worship Wars" which is basically a conflict within many congregations about what kind of music to use in worship. Should it be the old hymns? Or should it be the newest and latest songs on the top ten charts? Should the worship team compose new songs every week for the people, or should they repeat songs we have sung for years now?

Truth be told, no one will ever have all the songs they want sung in every service. So what if a song is sung that does not "do it for you"? Paul says, live at peace. Enjoy "your" songs and sing along with the songs of others that are not your songs. Live at peace...

But Paul does give some instructions about our singing in verse 16. He says,

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

The message is clear. Our songs we sing as the people of God together must be theologically sound, based on the Word of Christ, or scriptures. The message in a song cannot contradict what scripture says. It must not pluck a phrase out of context, or focus only on ourselves. All scripture points to Jesus, and so should our songs.

When Lem, Cecilia or me are looking for songs for the Sunday worship service it is less important that the song is popular, or catchy, or fun. What is most important is whether it is

Jesus focused, theologically correct and honouring to God. Yes, tunes matter and we pay attention to this as well, but a song must help the “word of Christ” dwell within us as singers.

There is a song on the radio these days that I confess drives me crazy. It is played on the Christian radio station, and is about God. But in the song there is a phrase that does not sit well with me. The phrase is, “Do what you are famous for.” Now I know the context is God can work miracles and do amazing things and it is a call to see God at work again. But that phrase seems so disrespectful to God. God does not do anything to be famous. He does what He does to be righteous, and loving and just. God is not looking to be a celebrity. This song I hope is never sung in a church worship service...

Songs should remind us of the greatest story ever told, the story of redemption found in Jesus. They should inspire us as the people of God, and humble us as the fallen creatures we are. They should stir us to action as we reflect on the mercy of God, and free us to give thanks for the mercies we experience every day from the hand of God. Our songs should reflect the Word of Christ.

Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther started a movement called the Protestant reformation. Not only was he a theologian and preacher, he was a prolific hymn writer who reinvigorated singing in the church. He wrote,

**Let God speak directly to his people through the scriptures,
And let His people respond with grateful songs of praise.²**

This is what the Apostle Paul is saying to us as well.

And notice what Paul says about how we should sing: **“with thanksgiving,” or “with gratitude in our hearts.”**

Yes, God commands us to sing over and over again in scripture, so we begrudgingly suffer through the songs until the sermon, right? “I will sing, if I must.” Is that how we are to sing?

No, we are to sing with thanksgiving. We are filled with gratitude to God for all he does for us, and as we sing about Jesus, his love, his sacrifice, his presence we are moved by his goodness. We sing about God as our Creator, sustainer and provider and we are grateful. We sing of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit and how He leads us, helps us, convicts us and fills us with love, joy and peace and we are thankful.

In their little book, “Sing!” the Getty’s suggest that it is impossible “...to sing what you are excited about in your spirit in a way that is tepid, tentative and withdrawn.”³ How we sing reveals how we think and feel about something.

² Ibid, xxiii

³ Ibid, p. 18.

I must have caught that from the adults in my world as a young boy who went to church twice every Sunday with his parents. When I was five years old, I would get on our old swing set in our back yard, and swing back and forth, my face soaking up the rays of the sun, and I would sing loudly the only lines I knew from a hymn we sang at church, “Heavenly sunlight. Heavenly sunlight. Flooding my soul with, glory divine. Heavenly sunlight. Heavenly sunlight. Halleluiah! Jesus is mine!” I was thankful for those sunny days and I wanted to give thanks to God for them.

Paul mentions Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs. I remember in a music class we tried to decide what was meant here.

Psalms are easy, for the Psalms were the hymnbook of the Jewish people, passed on to the church as well. To this day churches are filled with music inspired by the Psalms. I suspect that when Paul and Silas were in jail singing through the night this was the source of their songs.

Hymns are usually formal arrangements of theological ideas and thoughts. In Philippians 2 we read what likely was an ancient hymn in the church which describes Jesus humility that led him to empty himself of his divinity to become a man, and to die so that God would exalt him to the place above all others, so some day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

Today hymns continue to teach and lead us to the story of Jesus. Though we usually think of hymns being written years ago – even hundreds of years ago – God is inspiring new writers to pen hymns even today.

Spiritual songs were the simple, easily learned songs that moved the people in their worship. I would suggest this is what is used the most in many churches today. I wonder if Paul was looking for a balance in these three types of songs?

I am thankful today for songs we can sing that express the thankfulness in my heart for Jesus. Notice verse 17 says that whatever we do – even singing – should be done in the name of Jesus.

I leave you with one last thought.

WWJD (do you know what that means?) What would Jesus do?

He would sing. We remember so well what Jesus did the night he was betrayed. He took bread and broke it and said “This is my body.” He took the cup and passed it around saying, “This is my blood shed for you.” But was that all?

No. It says he led the disciples in singing a hymn and then they went out to pray. (cf. Mt 26:30)

And as Jesus hung on that cross he quoted from Psalm 22:1 which starts, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” but goes on to declare God’s victory. This would have been a Psalm Jesus sung since he was a boy, and now it comforted him on the cross.

We thank God for songs as they encourage us, uplift us, inspire us and help us to express our joyous gratitude to God for all He has done for us. Thank God for a song to sing!