

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: March 21, 2010

Music and the Ministry

by Dan Trygg

“Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Acts 2:46-47

“What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”

1 Corinthians 14:26

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹ and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

Ephesians 5:18-21

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

Colossians 3:16

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.”

James 5:13

We have been studying the nature of NT church meetings. We have seen how **the normative gathering of believers was a small group, meeting in a private home.** Church meetings were either in the very early morning (often at dawn), or (more often) **in the evening, because most people were busy working during the day.** There was no “day off” to go to church. Sunday was the first day of the work week for everyone in the culture of that day. (The 11:00 a.m. Sunday service was not invented for more than 1,500 years!) **There were four main ingredients that were common to early church gatherings. They devoted themselves to learning the apostolic doctrine, to personal sharing, eating a meal together, and spending time together seeking the Lord in prayer.** Such *meetings were intimate*. People shared their hearts with one another. These *meetings were also very interactive*. *Everyone* was encouraged and expected to participate. They came with songs to share, or short teachings of things they learned during the week, or that they felt were applicable to the group. Some came with a revelation, a dream, vision or word from the Lord for the group. **The only ground rules were that all things were to be done in an orderly fashion and to build people up** (I Cor. 14:12,26,40), not to selfishly hog time, or say things that were unintelligible or irrelevant, or to injure others by negative talk. The meal provided a tangible celebration experience that was to be shared together. This was an opportunity to talk together, to celebrate the Lord’s blessings, and generally was concluded with a celebration of the Lord’s supper, using the same bread and wine that had been served at the meal. This led into a time of worship and prayer, praising God and seeking Him together for the needs or opportunities currently before the group members.

We have discussed the emphasis on learning apostolic doctrine, and the interactive nature of the group in sharing with one another and in ministering to one another. We have not, however, looked into the use of music and song in these meetings. **There were two primary functions of music in these group meetings. Songs and music were employed to (1.) worship God; and (2.) instruct and build up one another.** Both are valid and important functions of the “music ministry” or the “service of music” in the Christian community. **It is important to understand and appreciate both aspects, and be able to utilize music effectively in both directions.** It is not uncommon to emphasize one aspect, and minimize of the other. When this happens, the entire group misses out on the full spectrum of benefits this powerful tool can bring.

Singing to and for God – I think most people understand this use of music. **It is the expression of devotion to God, delighting in who He is, commemorating His past actions, and calling on His present help and fellowship.** *The first recorded example of congregational singing* is found in Exodus 15, where Moses and the children of Israel sang a song of praise to the Lord. It *was to celebrate* their deliverance from Egypt and the army of Pharaoh. (This is also the first example we have of praise-*dancing*, and the use of percussion in praise, as well. – vs. 20,21.) The next memorable song noted in scripture commemorates the victory God gave Israel over the army of the Canaanite king, Jabin, and his ruthless general, Sisera (Judg. 5). This was sung by Deborah and Barak as a song to the Lord, but was also taught to the people to memorialize this victory. **The next great musical advance came with David, who was known as the “sweet psalmist of Israel”** (II Sam. 23:1). As a boy, he used to play his harp out in the field, watching his flocks. He became a skilled musician (I Sam. 16:16-23). The largest book in the Bible, the book of Psalms, consists in large part of songs which David wrote to God. Many of them initially were private songs of devotion, but their

inclusion in the corpus of this book destined them to be passed along to others, and to be used in public gatherings. **Later, when David became king, he appointed musicians and singers to offer praise in music and song to the Lord in the temple** which Solomon would build (I Chron. 25). One key observation here is that the root word for “psalm” means “to pluck”, referring to the plucking of the harp strings used by David and these other musicians. From this, we know that **instrumental music was employed in praise to God**. Whether by themselves, or in conjunction with the human voice, *a wide variety of instruments were employed to give expression to the mood and thoughts of worship conveyed in the music of God’s people*. Several kinds of stringed instruments are mentioned, along with the flute, pipe, horns and trumpets, drums, cymbals and timbrels. It is important to understand that this music was *offered to God day and night* in His temple (I Chron. 9:33; Psa. 134:1). This **temple music and singing was not primarily for congregational singing**. It was music and song offered to God as an act of worship, because of His greatness, not merely as an emotional or entertaining part of a congregational gathering. This music was totally directed *vertically*, ...offered to God..., with no regard to the ears of other human beings. Sacrifices and offerings were generally personal in nature, or a family affair. The music was happening in the background, but it was not *for you*. It would have been OK to sing along, but **in the temple there were no rousing “song services” for public consumption**. **Music and singing were directed toward God from the heart of the worshipper as an act of devotion**.

We have another glimpse of Temple worship in II Chron. 29, where Hezekiah called an assembly of the people, after cleansing the sanctuary after years of disuse. When the sacrifices were offered, he commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and Asaph (another author of Psalms), accompanied by music. Then the entire assembly worshipped until the sacrifice was completed. Thus, **the congregation assembled joined the singers in their worship of God**. From this incident, we see that **the book of Psalms became the primary songbook for worship for the people of God in ancient Israel**. Numerous times in the Psalms and in other writings, **we are commanded to sing praises to God** (Ex. 15:21; I Chron. 16:9,23; Psa. 5:11; 9:11; 30:4; 33:1-3; 47:6,7; 60:4; 66:2; 68:4,32; 81:1,2; 96:1,2; 98:1,4,5; 105:2; 147:7; 149:1; Isa. 12:5; 42:10; Jer. 20:13; 31:7; Jam. 5:13). Add to that all the *examples of godly men and women* who sang praises to God, and a very strong case can be made for the importance of song in the life of faith.

Singing can also be an act of faith, the response of trust in God’s word and a calling out to Him for help. Note the incident in Numbers 21:16-18. This follows shortly after two incidents where the people had complained against the Lord because they had no water. They had experienced the chastening of God. In this case, however, God spoke to Moses, telling him to gather the people, and He would give them water. When the people came together, even though there was no water to be seen, they began to sing, “Spring up, O well! Sing to it!” And the leaders dug with their staffs, and found water. *The singing seems to be a visionary act of faith*, which encouraged the leaders to dig and find what God had provided. A similar instance occurs in II Chron. 20, where God tells Jehoshaphat that he will not have to go out and fight the enemy, but God will fight the battle for him. They *were* to go down against them, but they were to station themselves and see what God would do on their behalf. They were not to fear, but *go out to face them*. In response to this word, the king and the people worshipped. The next day, under direction from the prophets, the Levites went ahead of the people and led them in singing and praising God in a loud voice. *As they did so*, God set ambushes in the wilderness against their enemies, they became confused and began attacking each other until they were destroyed. This is a lesson in the natural realm that also has great implications for spiritual warfare.

Singing to and for the people – The other clear purpose for songs and music in the Bible is for the benefit of the people. Not only can music be a beautiful and enjoyable experience, but it has further benefits. It is clear from Deuteronomy 31:19 that **God understood that music is a powerful medium to help people learn and remember truth**. He told Moses, “Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, in order that this song may be a witness for Me among the sons of Israel.” We also see in the passages from Acts and Ephesians mentioned above that **the early church was regularly engaged in singing together, both in worship and for the purpose of instructing and encouraging one another**. Acts 2:47 mentions that *they were praising God*, which would have included singing. The prayers that they “devoted themselves to” (Acts 2:42) would certainly have included prayers of devotion and worship, punctuated by songs of praise. Note that I Cor. 14:26 specifically mentions that “each one has a psalm” as part of what they shared together when they met. The admonitions to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” and to “be filled with the Spirit” are both followed by interactive singing and praising. Why? **Songs have the ability to open up and express the heart**. **Often, when we are discouraged, a song will be able to reach inside of us to lift us up**. This is an important aspect of a church meeting, because it can so effectively express our emotion and move us into the joy of the Lord (Neh. 8:10). **In order to minister songs to one another, we have to develop a repertoire of songs that we know**. This enriches us with a vocabulary of devotion, helps us learn valuable truth, and equips us to help others. **Part of the discipling work we do includes teaching people the spiritual songs of the church**.