

The Significance of Singing

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Introduction

As we examine passages in the New Testament that describe occasions of worship, and the type music that was employed by disciples of Jesus, a consistent pattern is evident.

Nine passages provide examples of believers who sang praises to God or offer divinely inspired instruction relating to this expression of worship (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:12; James 5:13).

Additionally, Hebrews 13:15 offers the following related admonition: "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

What lessons can we learn by considering the context of these passages? First, we see what is involved in scriptural singing. Second, we observe the wide variety of circumstances in which singing praises to God is appropriate.

*After **singing a hymn**, they went out to the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30).*

*After **singing a hymn**, they went out to the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:26).*

*But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and **singing hymns of praise** to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25).*

*and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "Therefore I will give praise to You among the Gentiles, And **I will sing** to Your name" (Rom. 15:9).*

*What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; **I will sing** with the spirit and **I will sing** with the mind also (1 Cor. 14:15).*

*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and making melody with your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).*

*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 (Col. 3:16).*

*saying, "I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation **I will sing** Your praise" (Heb. 2:12).*

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name (Heb. 13:15, NASB95)

*Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to **sing** praises (James 5:13).*

What is Involved in Scriptural Singing

Engages the Mind and Spirit

Scriptural singing engages the mind and the spirit (1 Cor. 14:13-19, esp. v. 15).

*Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. **What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.** Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified. I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue (1 Cor. 14:13-19, NASB95)*

Provides a Means of Communication

Scriptural singing provides a means of spiritual communication, an occasion for teaching and admonishing (Eph. 5:15-21, esp. v. 19; Col. 3:16).

*Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, **speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;** always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Eph. 5:15-21, NASB95)*

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 (Col. 3:16, NASB95)

Affords for Proclamation and Praise

Scriptural singing affords an opportunity for proclamation and praise (Rom. 15:7-13, esp. v. 9; Heb. 2:10-13, esp. v. 12; cf. also Heb. 13:15).

*Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, **and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME."** Again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE." And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM." Again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE." Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 15:7-13, NASB95)

*For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, **saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE."** And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME" (Heb. 2:10-13, NASB95)*

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name (Heb. 13:15).

When is Scriptural Singing Appropriate?

In Times of Good Cheer

According to James 5:13, when believers are cheerful, they should sing praises: "Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises."

Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises (James 5:13).

The Greek word *euthumeō* (εὐθυμέω) means "to be of good cheer" (Thomas 2114) or "be cheerful" (BDAG). Occurring 3x in the NASB, it is translated "cheerful" (James 5:13) and "keep up... courage" (Acts 27:22, 25). Note that the root word, *euthumos* (cheerful, in good spirits), also occurs in the same context in which Paul sought to encourage his shipboard companions (Acts 27:36).

*But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along. Running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the ship's boat under control. After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along. The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. **Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned. When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss. "Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage (euthumeō), for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. "For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' "Therefore, keep up your courage (euthumeō), men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. "But we must run aground on a certain island." But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land. They took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms. Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak. But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it fall away. Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. "Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish." Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to***

eat. All of them were encouraged (euthumos) and they themselves also took food." (Acts 27:14-36, NASB95)

Hebrew wisdom literature abounds in admonitions that we be of good cheer (Prov. 15:13-17; Eccl. 9:7-9).

A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, But when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken. The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, But the mouth of fools feeds on folly. All the days of the afflicted are bad, But a cheerful heart has a continual feast. Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it. Better is a dish of vegetables where love is Than a fattened ox served with hatred (Prov. 15:13-17, NASB95)

Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun (Eccl. 9:7-9, NASB95)

Charitable gifts should not be offered grudgingly or under compulsion, but willingly and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:6-7, NASB95)

In like manner, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs provide opportunities for us to sing joyfully to the Lord (Ps. 51:14-17; 59:16-17).

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise (Ps. 51:14-17, NASB95)

"But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, For You have been my stronghold And a refuge in the day of my distress. O my strength, I will sing praises to You; For God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness (Ps. 59:16-17, NASB95)

In Times of Confusion and Sadness

After observing the Passover on the night of his betrayal, Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn before departing to the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:20-30, esp. v. 30; Mark 14:17-26, esp. v. 26).

*Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. As they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, "Surely not I, Lord?" And He answered, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. "The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself." While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." **After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives** (Matt. 26:20-30, NASB95)*

*When it was evening He came with the twelve. As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me." They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?" And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. "For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. "Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." **After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives** (Mark 14:17-26, NASB95)*

The message He shared in the upper room caused the disciples considerable grief (John 16: 5-7, 19-22). Therefore, He said, "Do not let your heart be troubled" (John 14:1, 27).

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me (John 14:1, NASB95)

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful (John 14:27, NASB95)

But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' 'But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you (John 16:5-7, NASB95)

Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'? "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. "Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. "Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you (John 16:19-22, NASB95)

Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you (John 16:22, NASB95)

Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs can provide comfort in times of emotional distress (Ps. 42:5-8).

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence. O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me. The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; And His song will be with me in the night, A prayer to the God of my life (Ps. 42:5-8, NASB95)

In Times of Mistreatment and Suffering

While laboring at Philippi, Paul and Silas were falsely accused of wrongdoing, beaten and imprisoned without due process; yet, after a really bad day, at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God (Acts 16:16-30, esp. v. 25).

It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and

*dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans." The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. **But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;** and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:14-30, NASB95)*

Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs can provide comfort in times of mistreatment and suffering (Ps. 22:11-24).

Be not far from me, for trouble is near; For there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots. But You, O LORD, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance. Deliver my soul from the sword, My only life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth; From the horns of the wild oxen You answer me. I will tell of Your name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the LORD, praise Him; All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard (Ps. 22:11-24, NASB95)

Conclusion

Do you understand that scriptural singing engages the mind and the spirit? Do you recognize that it provides a means of spiritual communication, an occasion for teaching and admonishing? Are you appreciative of being able to participate in occasions of proclamation and praise?

Do you recognize the need to sing praises to God in times of good cheer, in times of confusion and sadness, and in times of mistreatment and suffering?