

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 of 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.

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).

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).

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).

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." 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).

Hebrew wisdom literature abounds in admonitions that we be of good cheer (Prov. 15:13-17; Eccl. 9:7-9). Charitable gifts should not be offered grudgingly or under compulsion, but willingly and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-7). 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).

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

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

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?