

Singing Unto Jesus

By Elder Aaron Binion

“Show me a church’s songs and I’ll show you their theology” (Gordon Fee). When you want to know what people really believe about Jesus, listen to and watch them sing.

Lesson Text: Isaiah 12

Why Do We Sing?

Spiritual singing is the response of a regenerate heart and an expression of experiential knowledge of Christ through the new birth (John 3:5-8). Through repentance and faith in Christ, God’s anger over our sin was taken away and Jesus becomes our strength, salvation, and song. His Lordship demands something of worth (worship) - nothing less than the full engagement of our hearts, minds, and wills (Psalm 103:1). His word commands singing 400 times. With 50 direct commands, singing is the most common command in scripture. John Newton’s “Let us Love and Sing and Wonder” tells us why we sing. He has hushed the law’s loud thunder, quenched Mt. Sinai’s flame, washed us with His blood, presents our souls to God, and one day will bring us home. Great is the Lord and worthy of praise (Psalm 145:3). The Father seeketh them that worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Christians sing because Christ did - instituting the supper (Matthew 26:30; Psalm 115-118), on the cross (Psalm 22), and when He resurrected (Hebrews 2:12, Romans 15:9). “Sing unto the Lord a new song” isn’t merely new words, style, or accompaniment, it’s the reality and experience of the new heart redeemed and set free to sing. Singing doesn’t just prepare us to hear God’s word, experiencing God’s word moves us to sing. Music is the easiest way a parent can fulfill the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Families that pray and sing together stay together.

To Whom Do We Sing?

Jesus is the ultimate priority. Without Jesus the Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) and His sacrifice, no one could enter God’s presence. Without Jesus our singing would never be accepted by Holy God. Singing to Jesus is like a see-saw - the lower we humble ourselves the higher He is exalted. When He directs our worship, He is on display, lifted up, and He will draw all men unto Himself. Preachers must study

and show themselves approved and so must music directors (2 Timothy 2:15). Don't "kick the singer" - when the song leader wears the congregation out with bad singing and then expects the preacher to preach. Churches coming together singing to Jesus will be a temple gathered. He will build it into a spiritual house offering spiritual sacrifices made acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). When Jesus is front and center a church will be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:23-30). Singing is the first mark of being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). As Missionary Baptists we demand our preachers pray and get a message from the Lord. Music directors must also pray and get their song selection and direction from the Lord. When both preacher and music director follow the direction of the Holy Spirit there will be cohesion in the worship service. Fear of being "Bapti-Costal" causes us to forget that the Holy Spirit directs our singing to Jesus. Without Him singing is dull, boring, and dead.

What Do We Sing?

God created singing and music to help us remember His word (Deuteronomy 31:21). Historically, the greatest hymn writers were preachers (Newton, Wesley, Luther). People couldn't remember what they preached, but they remembered what they sang. Paul often quoted hymns (Ephesians 5:14, Philippians 2:5-10). Jesus quoted Psalms. Paul said, "I will sing with the spirit, I will sing with the mind also" (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). Jesus rebuked those who worshiped Him with their lips but not their hearts (Matthew 15:8). But that's what goes on when people don't think about the words they are singing or are moved by the tune rather than the truth. Colossians 3:16 says, "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Paul called for variety because God's attributes are vast and deserve variety. Whatever the type, spiritual singing comes from the heart and is to the Lord. Songs must center on Christ, show us Christ, and Jesus must be the audience. If singing isn't centering our minds and hearts on Christ then it's not singing. More heresy has crept into churches through song than any other form of communication (Arius). Rules of discernment: Is it true? Is it gospel? Do I have a book, chapter, or verse for this? What does this song tell me about sin (law) or about Jesus (gospel)? Does this strengthen my faith or deflate it? Does this honor God or me? Does this motivate me to love God more or is it just an emotional occasion for my flesh? Is there any spiritual value in singing this? If a song isn't scriptural then don't sing it. If it sounds bad then change it.

Remix the old lyrics from the 1800's with new melodies. It's the truth of the lyrics that can't change.

How Does It Sound?

“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6). God rejoices over His people with LOUD singing (Zephaniah 3:17). “Beware of singing as if you were half-dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of Satan” (John Wesley, Preface to Select Hymns [1761]). Jesus deserves our best. David put the best musicians in the temple and required them to be well instructed in the songs (1 Chronicles 25:7). More than rudiments or accompaniment, but what the songs actually meant. God told the people in Amos's day to quit singing because their hearts were not in it (Amos 5:23). To all put off by heartless worship there will be a day when with all our heart we will gather around His throne singing blessing and honor and glory and power to Him who sits on the throne (Revelation 5:13). Every song we sing until then is a dress rehearsal for that day. Music schools and practice are needed, but the Father hears us through His Son whose sacrifice was perfect. He listens to the heart.

How Do We Fix It?

Worldliness, spiritual dryness, and heartache has greatly hindered our singing (Psalm 137). When you aren't enjoying your salvation, you aren't singing to Jesus. Sing until you are. What will fix our singing isn't new styles, instruments, music schools, or song books. The answer is repentance and a return of the joy we once had in the Lord. Paul and Silas sang until the jailhouse rocked (Acts 16:25). Jehoshaphat didn't know what to do. With his eyes on the Lord he sent the choir out to battle and God won the victory (2 Chronicles 20:21-22) “Get up and lead God's people to sing about the greatness of our God. Our God is greater than all of this. He alone can fix this. Sing about Jesus. He is worth more than all of this” (Sis. Wanda Oliver).

Conclusion

“A person who gives this some thought and yet does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being. He should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs” (Martin Luther in Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae iucundae*, a collection of chorale motets).