

“Musical Praise”—Psalm 147:1

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Musical Praise”, is Psalm 147:1 → *Hallelujah! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

The connection of music with the worship of Yahweh is thousands of years old. In fact, music and worship are so intertwined that one may not be able to think about the praise of God without thinking about music. Remember the *multitude of the heavenly host* that appeared *with the angel* who announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds? Many understand their praise to God as sung: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.* However, that’s an assumption. Actually the text says they appeared *praising God and **saying***, not singing (cf. Luke 2:13-14).

The first mention of music is in connection to the great-great-great-great grandson of Cain, Jubal. Genesis 4:21 tells us that *he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe*, possibly a reference to his

inventing music. Apparently his descendants were a very musical family. Throughout the Scriptures we encounter singing and playing musical instruments connected with rejoicing at feasts, marriage celebrations and victories over enemies, as well as during times of mourning the death of loved ones, struggles in peoples' lives, and even with parties of debauchery and immorality.

The melding of music with the worship of God happened especially when *the ark of the LORD* was brought into Jerusalem and placed into the tabernacle (i.e. the tent within which God was worshiped) by King David in 1002 BC. According to 1 Chronicles 15:16, *David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play **loudly** on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy.* Guess that puts a perspective on the injunction given in Psalm 100:1 → *With trumpets and the sound of the horn **make a joyful noise** before the King, the LORD!* At any rate, specific people were appointed to lead the congregation in worship with musical instruments and singing in the Old Testament Temple.

Our text begins with the instruction, *Hallelujah!* It is the Hebrew word meaning, "Praise Yahweh!" (i.e. Praise the LORD!). In our hymnal we use it in it's Greek form of "alleluia." It is actually a call to the congregation to worship *the God Who made the world and everything in it, the One Who is Lord of heaven and earth and Who gives to all mankind life and*

breath and everything (cf. Acts 10:24-25). So what does it mean to praise the LORD?

Praise is commonly used by people in the sense of the dictionary definition: “to express a favorable judgment of.” (Merriam-Webster, I. © 1996. Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary (10th ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.) It is a positive reinforcement of acceptable behavior in people from potty training to the Pulitzer Prize. It is seen amongst the behavioral sciences as crucial to soliciting good behavior in people in every area of life, many times in reference to positive reinforcement. It is seen as an important tool for building self esteem, curbing bad behavior and producing citizens who contribute to the well-being of your community and society as a whole.

There is a huge difference between this concept of praise and that bound up in the word, *Hallelujah!* The praise of the LORD flows from a totally different motivation. While praise is telling God just how wonderful He is, it is not done in an effort to manipulate Him to function in a manner which an individual sees himself to be proper and good. Rather, it is an act of submission to Him based upon a proper relationship with Him. This relationship has been defined by Him in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ for us sinners. True praise of God can only flow from a heart humbled in His presence and filled with the forgiveness of sins in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is why so many of the hymns we use in worship speak of our sin in light of His grace; of the law which convicts us of our sins and the Gospel which releases the guilt of our sin in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, true praise of God flows from repentance and faith in the atoning work of Jesus, in the confession of sins and absolution (i.e. the pronouncement of your sins forgiven in the stead of Christ). Only with such faith and forgiveness can you sing: *Bless* (i.e. speak a kind word about) *the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits*. Those benefits and the basis for such praise and blessing are described in the next verses of that song: *Who forgives all your iniquity, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, Who satisfies you with good* (cf. Psalm 103:2-5).

Our text also mentions this praise being encapsulated in music: *For it is good to **sing praises** to our God; for it is pleasant, and a **song of praise** is fitting*. But what if music is not your forte? What if you are not “musically inclined” and your best effort at “carrying a tune” is the tune you carry in your cell phone, or play from your stereo system or radio? What do you do during those parts of worship expressed in singing? Sit and twiddle your thumbs until the song is finished? Maybe it’s because there are so many “tone death” people that we are told in Psalm 95:2 to *come into His presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful **noise** to*

Him with songs of praise!

No, that's not what this praise is about. The focus of our text is not on the music as much as it is on the message. It is just as much praise to the Lord Jesus to read the words of a hymn while others around you sing them. What do you do when an individual or choir performs a musical piece during the worship service? As you meditate upon the words being sung, you too can join in their praise to the LORD in your heart, silently speaking an "Amen!" to the words being proclaimed. In fact, the key to proper worship in all forms is a heart that has been made new by the Holy Spirit, cleansed from sin in the atoning work of Jesus.

We are instructed in Hebrews 10:22 to *draw near to God with a **true heart** in full assurance of faith, with our **hearts sprinkled clean** from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*. Such a heart, cleansed of sin in the atoning work of Jesus, to which you were connected in your baptism, is fit for praising the LORD. Such a heart hears the words of Psalms 33:3 properly: *Sing to the LORD a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts*. Such a heart recognizes every song sung and played in praise to Yahweh as new every time it is sung, no matter how old the song. As your *inner self* (i.e. your heart) *is being renewed day by day* (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16) in the forgiveness of your sins, your songs of praise are also *renewed day by day* in sanctified praise!

Many of the hymns in our hymnal are songs of praise addressed directly to God. The pronouns used in those hymns (i.e. you, thee, thy, thine) are defined at the beginning of our worship with the invocation (i.e. “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”). Others are prayers, seeking His forgiveness, guidance, strength, courage and the power of His Holy Spirit for daily living. Some are teaching hymns, applying the teachings of the Scriptures to our lives. As we sing them we confess those articles of the faith publicly as truth for our lives. Some hymns speak about the various events of Jesus which He underwent for our salvation (e.g. His birth, baptism, temptation, death, etc.). Some are based upon various narratives or parables or metaphors used in Scripture to describe God’s working amongst His people in relationship with them. In our praise we strive to follow the command of Colossians 3:16 → *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Thus, *it is good to sing praises to our God* because He has brought us sinners *to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved* (cf. Ephesians 1:5-6). *It is pleasant . . . to sing praises to our God* because of hearts which have been given peace through His grace in the Person & Work of Jesus. *And a song of praise*

is fitting because He alone is worthy to be praised! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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