

## A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLES “Singing to the Lord”

### **Introduction-**

*We have been studying the various components of a worship service to better understand how we as a church can most effectively be “a house of prayer for all peoples.” Praising the Lord in song is an integral part of approaching His throne in prayer.*

### *Music and Prayer-*

Mark 11:15-17

15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves,

16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.

17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" NIV

*The Greek word translated “prayer” in this verse is proseuche and it means “prayer to God.” The Lord’s house is to be a house of supplication to Him for all nations. Jesus was quoting Isaiah 56:7.*

Isa 56:7

these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." NIV

*The Hebrew word translated “prayer in this verse is tephillah. This word is used both for non-liturgical and non-poetical prayer as well as prayers set to music and sung in the formal worship service. It is used in the title of Habakkuk’s prayer song (Hab. 3:1) and in the titles of 5 Psalms (3 by David [17:1; 86:1; 142:1], 1 by Moses [90:1], and 1 by an afflicted man [102:1]). In the use of the word tephillah we see a direct combination of prayer and music. This relation can also be seen in the New Testament.*

Col 3:16-17

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. NIV

*Verse 15 shows the body context of these verses. As members of the body relate to one another, there is teaching, singing, and then thanksgiving.*

Rev 5:8

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. NIV

*In this worship service in heaven, we see worship in the presence of the harps and prayer in the golden bowls of incense.*

*Music comes from God (Ps. 40:3) and is an implement of the spirit realm. If the spoken word be likened to a sword (Eph 6:17), the sung and shouted word is that double-edged sword swung two-fisted into the ranks of the enemy as the sound of our praise reaches the ears of heaven. Words are spirit (air in motion), songs are words in motion in a focused wavelength.*

### **The Primary Purpose of Music-**

*Song has surrounds the throne of God from the commencement of time.*

Isa 6:3

And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." NIV

Rev 4:8

Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." NIV

*The most primary and continual use of music has been to worship God. The sons of God, the angels, sang His praise at the creation of the earth.*

Job 38:4-7

4 "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.  
5 Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?  
6 To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone,  
7 When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy? NKJV

*Not only are the angelic sons of God to worship Him, the redeemed sons of God are to worship Him as well.*

Rev 5:6-14

6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.  
7 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.  
8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

- 9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.
- 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."
- 11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.
- 12 In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"
- 13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"
- 14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped. NIV

*All of creation makes sound because it is all to praise God.*

Ps 96:11-12

- 11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it;  
12 let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; NIV

Ps 148

- 1 Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above.  
2 Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts.  
3 Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars.  
4 Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.  
5 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.  
6 He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.  
7 Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,  
8 lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding,  
9 you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars,  
10 wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds,  
11 kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth,  
12 young men and maidens, old men and children.  
13 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.  
14 He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the LORD. NIV

*All the Lord has made has resonance and all of His creation is to resound with the song of His praise. The primary purpose of music, then, is to worship God. But it is not the only purpose music has or the only purpose it has been put to.*

## **Types of Music-**

### *Sacred-*

*When we speak of the sacred versus the secular, we are talking about the music of the Temple service versus the music of the street. Though much of the folk music had religious overtones, none of the music of the Temple had any secular overtones. In style and presentation it was separated from the popular music of the day. It utilized specific instruments (trumpets and cymbals for signaling, harps and lyres for accompaniment) and only male voices (in the Levitical choirs).*

*In contrast, the popular music of the day utilized many different instruments and included the heavily rhythmic music of the women, who would sing and dance while playing tambourines.*

*During any revival in the Old Testament period that included the Temple economy, the people returned to the musical forms instituted by David. In other words, during a revival a return was made to the foundational principles of the faith. The revivals were not characterized by the development of new styles of music. To be sure, new songs were probably written. But they were written within the context of the music styles set down by David (which he had received by revelation from God).*

*Sacred song in the history of God's people has had three major focuses: sacrifice-centered, Word-centered, and Christ-centered.*

### **Sacrifice-centered:**

2 Chron 29:21-24

- 21 They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven male lambs and seven male goats as a sin offering for the kingdom, for the sanctuary and for Judah. The king commanded the priests, the descendants of Aaron, to offer these on the altar of the LORD.
- 22 So they slaughtered the bulls, and the priests took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar; next they slaughtered the rams and sprinkled their blood on the altar; then they slaughtered the lambs and sprinkled their blood on the altar.
- 23 The goats for the sin offering were brought before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them.
- 24 The priests then slaughtered the goats and presented their blood on the altar for a sin offering to atone for all Israel, because the king had ordered the burnt offering and the sin offering for all Israel. NIV

*This scene takes place during the revival of Hezekiah. The first part of the service was the offering of blood sacrifices to atone for sin.*

2 Chron 29:25-29

- 25 He stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the LORD through his prophets.
- 26 So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments, and the priests with their trumpets.

- 27 Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the LORD began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel.
- 28 The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed.
- 29 When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped. NIV

*The singing started after the sin offering and in coordination with the burnt offering. The burnt offering was an offering of thanksgiving and praise, as was the song.*

Ps 69:30-31

30 I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.

31 This will please the LORD more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hoofs. NIV

*Singing is equated to the burnt offering sacrifice. The music of the Temple was sacrifice centered. "It did not attempt to secure a favorable response from the Lord but presupposed such a response as something already given. The music that accompanied the atoning sacrifice invited them to accept and celebrate God's gracious provision of salvation."<sup>1</sup>*

Word-centered:

*The music of the synagogue was exclusively vocal, with the only instrument being the shofar, which was used for signaling. It took the form of chanting Scripture, or cantillation. A chant is a musical form composed of a simple melody in which a number of words or syllables are sung on the same note. In our understanding, a regular song is words set to music. A chant is music set to words.*

*The song service of the synagogue helped reinforce the truth of Scripture. Scriptural truth was directly proclaimed by the congregation in song.*

Christ-centered:

*The hymns of the early church were Christ-centered. They were designed to extol Christ's redemptive accomplishments. Several of these hymns are preserved for us in the New Testament. Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 5:14; and Phil. 2:6-11 are all thought to be early Christ hymns as is 1 Tim. 3:16.*

1 Tim 3:16

And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness:

He who was revealed in the flesh,

Was vindicated in the Spirit,

Beheld by angels,

Proclaimed among the nations,

Believed on in the world,

Taken up in glory. NAS

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<sup>1</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Christian and Rock Music: A Study of Biblical Principles of Music*, p. 205. I owe this and many other insights in this teaching to Mr. Bacchiocchi. In particular, chapters 2 and 7 of this book.

*Secular:*

*The presence of secular music appears early on in Scripture.*

Gen 4:20-22

20 Adah gave birth to Jubal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock.

21 His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute.

22 Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah. NIV

*That the father of those who play the harp and flute appears between the father who invented mobile shelters and husbandry and the one who invented tool making doesn't just prove that he was the middle child. It also shows the important place in the life of mankind that music plays. God has made us to need and enjoy music.*

Eccl 2:8

I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man. NIV

*In the second part of this verse, Solomon equates the pleasure of musical entertainment with that of physical satisfaction. This should give us some indication of the important role music plays in our lives.*

*When the exiles returned to the land from Babylon, they brought back both sacred and secular music.*

Ezra 2:41

41 The singers: the descendants of Asaph 128

65 besides their 7,337 menservants and maidservants; and they also had 200 men and women singers. NIV

*The 200 men and women singers were the secular entertainers. Entertainers have their place in a society and culture. Just because the music is secular doesn't make it bad. But just because it isn't bad doesn't mean that it is fit to be sacred either.*

*In the Bible, the benign forms of secular music included wedding songs (Song of Solomon), national anthems of victory (1 Sam 18:6-7; Ex. 15:20-21, the sacred song is in verses 1-18), dirges and folk dance music (Luke 7:32). But there was also bad secular music.*

*Bad Music:*

*Music can be made bad by the sound or the purpose it is put to. Two examples of bad secular music from the Bible are drinking songs and the songs of prostitutes.*

Isa 23:15-16

15 At that time Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, the span of a king's life. But at the end of these seventy years, it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the prostitute:

16 "Take up a harp, walk through the city, O prostitute forgotten; play the harp well, sing many a song, so that you will be remembered." NIV

Isa 24:7-9

7 The new wine dries up and the vine withers; all the merrymakers groan.

8 The gaiety of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the revelers has stopped, the joyful harp is silent.

9 No longer do they drink wine with a song; the beer is bitter to its drinkers. NIV

*It should seem obvious to us that drinking songs and harlot's songs would be bad music. The musical forms used would have been composed to entice those listening to it to participate in the activity they were advertising – much in the same way that heavily rhythmic music makes you want to dance. Even if you changed the words of the songs, yet kept the same style, the music would be bad. It would not be fit for sacred use. This is why in the Temple economy there was an intentional difference between even the benign secular music and the sacred, not to mention the bad.*

*Here is where it gets challenging. Labels on the music don't make the music sacred or secular, good or bad. The music itself does that. If I had a recording of Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> symphony and put a rock album label on it, it wouldn't change that beautiful symphony into rock music. By the same token, even if I call rock music classical, it doesn't make it such.*

2 Cor 11:14-15

14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. NIV

*I believe greater discernment is necessary when listening to "Christian" music or participating in any type of "Christian" art form than any other artistic expression. Why? Because if I know it is secular, I usually have my guard up already. But when someone sticks a "Christian" label on it, I have a tendency to want to trust it. But that is exactly where I should expect the attack from the enemy because he "masquerades as an angel of light."*

Heb 5:14

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. KJV

*We are not allowed the luxury of leaving our senses simply because something has a Christian label. Simply because believers make the music doesn't make the music good.*

Amos 5:23

23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. NIV

Amos 6:5-6

5 You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments.

6 You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. NIV

*The noisy songs in Amos are not to be confused with “a joyful noise.” The noise of the joyful noise is really a mistranslation. It should read “a shout of joy.” The joyful shout is an organized and recognizable sound. This noise in Amos is a loud, tumultuous, confusing sound.*

*One simple means of discerning between proper and improper use of music in worship is to check the volume. Certainly there was loud music in the Temple worship. But we must understand that loudness in its cultural context. Neither the singers nor the instrumentalists were amplified electronically, thus they could not put out a sound that was physically damaging.*

*When working without amplification, one can increase the volume of sound by greater intensity in singing and the use of more singers. But two singers don't make a sound twice as loud as one singer. The same goes for non-amplified instruments. For instance, if you play a piano tone at 50 decibels (dB) and add to that tone one of the same intensity, the combined effect will only be about 53 dB. If you add to them a third tone of the same intensity, the combined effect would be about 55 dB. In other words, with each additional tone, there is a decreasing combined incremental effect. No addition doubles the original intensity of the single tone.*

*For reference sake, a human whisper is about 20 dB and a jet airplane on take off can produce about 140 dB – which is right at the threshold of human pain. The Levitical choirs in the Temple probably produced a sound volume that at the most was between 70 to 80 dB. By contrast, a four-man rock group with the right amplification system can put out a sound power in the 130-140 dB range! If the music we are using to worship God is so loud that it is damaging the hearing of the worshipers, it cannot be right. Even if the music is good, it is being played in the wrong way.*

### **The Focus of Worship-**

*As was stated earlier, the focus of our worship should be God. The Church has gone through several phases with regard to its worship music and how it views its relationship with God.*

*For the first fifteen hundred years of the church, the primary theological viewpoint was that of a transcendent God, a “God beyond us.” In this frame of mind, God was primarily “out there somewhere” and worship of Him was highly reverential and avoided any presumptive intimacy.*

*The next phase the Church went through could be termed a “God for Us” orientation. This theological orientation became prominent with the Protestant Reformation when the priesthood of the believer was recaptured and the perceived gap between God and man was narrow (with regard to intimacy). At this stage, God was seen as near and dear, a Savior whom the believers could approach directly.*

*The next prominent orientation the Church underwent was the “God within Us.” This orientation began with a God beside us view and developed into the God within us focus. God does indeed dwell within us. But when this view combined itself with the secular/humanistic*



*music of the late nineteenth century, it was the US that got emphasized, not God. What was happening in us became more important than Who was working in us.*

*The trend from focus on God to focus on self was most prominent in the music of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.*

Examine Free to Dance vs. Great is Thy Faithfulness.

*Our focus in worship should be the Lord.*

*Another means of discerning music is to examine its composition, the ratio between melody, harmony, and rhythm. The melody is the spirit of the song, the harmony the soul, and the rhythm the body. Our worship songs should be dominated by melody.*

Eph 5:19

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; KJV

*Suppose the music where a person you were meeting for the first time. Generally, the voice is the first thing we hear from the person. This would be his spirit (out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks). If we get to know each other well, we may be close enough to hear each other breath. This would be the soul. If we became very intimate, we might hear their heartbeat. These would be the melody, harmony, and rhythm of the music. Any music that tries to introduce itself by giving you its heartbeat first should be considered presumptuous and rude!*

*We should be discerning and exercise purity when presenting music in worship to our Lord. Just as He did not accept animal sacrifices that were inferior or defiled, He will not accept music that is worldly and not sacred.*