

Psalm 33: 1-3 and 20-22; “Rejoice in the Lord You Righteous!”, A Sermon prepared for the Afternoon Worship Service, and the observance of the Lord’s Supper, and delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on June 3rd, 2020.

The heart of a Christian is designed by God, in the New Birth, to rejoice in Him always. We are exhorted to this wonderful duty in the book of Philippians, chapter 4, verse 4, when the apostle tells us to “rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice”. Our modern word “rejoice” appears in its origin to be made up of two parts, “re”, which means again, and “joy” which means to lift up your thoughts in happiness and confidence. In our case, we are rejoicing in the One who has made us, and has saved us from all of our sins. We want to walk with our God continually rejoicing in the goodness and power of His grace. We will be considering what our God has done for us through Jesus Christ our Lord; the reasons why we ought continually to rejoice in Him.

1st of all – We as God’s people ought to rejoice in Him always because praise coming from us to Him is beautiful. (verses 1-3)

Verse 1 says – “Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous!” “For praise from the upright is beautiful.” “Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.” “Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy.” Praise is the activity of rejoicing in the Christian. It is one of the best ways that a Christian can show forth their love to God for who He is and for what He does. If you will think back with me to the time when you first called upon the name of the Lord, you prayed for mercy, because you had come to know that you were a sinner. You knew that your sins deserved punishment, for God is a just and holy God. He cannot look favorably on the least sin. You came to realize that He could not pass it by in you, and this is why He sent His Son, to bear your sins in your place, on the cross. You believed in Him, and you were saved.

Now that you have found Christ, when you pray to Him, you are still asking that God’s mercy would be shown to you, because You realize that it is through Christ alone that God gives you everything that you need for life and godliness, so that you will become a person who is pleasing to Him in all of your ways. Your orientation is Godward, now that you have come to know Him. And so your greatest hope is that you will glorify Him, and in your walk with Him that you would enjoy Him; that you would be glad in Him, that you would joy and rejoice in Him. What these verses are saying, what David is saying, is that one of the greatest parts of your being able to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever, is your learning to rejoice in Him every moment of every day; so that you are coming to understand that praise is a beautiful thing to Him. You feel in your heart that you want to sing to Him. You want to make melody to Him in your heart, and upon whatever instruments that you might be able to play, as well. With David, it was an instrument of ten strings; a lute or a harp.

I want to develop this truth with you, for a few minutes, in terms of our Reformed worship; that is, the use of instruments in our worship. In these verses here, David is showing us several things, which I think will instruct us, about how we should go about to praise and worship God; both in private worship, and in public worship. You know, ever since the Reformation, there have been some godly men who have said that instruments should not be used in the worship of our God. They believe that it violates the Regulative Principle of Worship. The Regulative Principle of Worship is that in our public worship we should only do those things which are commanded of us in word of God. And so, some men think that because they do not see the use of instruments commanded in the New Testament, that therefore it is wrong to use them in public worship.

The Regulative principle, I would assert to you, is a good principle if right conclusions are drawn. But here, in the verses that we studying, David, by inspiration of the Spirit commands

that instruments be used in corporate worship, in verses 2 and 3 of our Psalm. And further, he writes it down in many other places in the Psalms. Words like these – “Praise the Lord with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.” “Play skillfully with a shout of joy.” And so we must ask ourselves – Was this injunction to worship with instruments simply given for Old Testament times? Personally, I find it a little strange that men who do not want to sing anything but the Psalms in public worship will not follow the commands of David in the Psalms saying that instruments are to be used! But let’s think for a moment about what David is commanding here and see if we can apply it to ourselves in New Testament times.

I believe that we ought to be able to think of the use of instruments in this way: Whatever David did in personal worship in that day, we ought legitimately to be able to do in personal worship in our day. Whatever David did in corporate worship in that day, we New Testament Christians ought to be able to do the same, provided that it is governed by the particular rules and principles of how that musical worship was conducted in Old Testament times, and as how it is regulated by the apostle Paul in his New Testament letters. The first principle of why I think that instruments can be used in New Testament worship is related to the unity of Old and New Testaments in terms of the reverence, and joy, and rejoicing which we are commanded to give in both. I think that the verses that we are studying today, show us that the New Testament worship should build off of the Old, and not necessarily forbid any aspect of it, in terms of the singing or the use of musical instruments.

Even though there is no specific command reiterated in the New Testament, for the use of particular instruments, or for the use any instruments at all, for that matter, it does not forbid them. And since we as the New Testament Church look to the Psalms for much of our devotional instruction, it does seem inconsistent to arbitrarily forbid instrumentation on the basis that it is not commanded in New. If it is not right in the New Testament times, why was it right in the Old? The instruction in regard to use of instruments, as it was commanded by David for the Old Testament saints of God, was a part of their devotional instruction. And I believe that it was given to be a part of ours, as well. We see from verses 2 and 3 that these instructions were given, by David, in terms not only of God’s saints in that day praising God and rejoicing in Him as a people, but our rejoicing in Him and praising Him in the same way, if we are to be consistent. After all, both the saints in the Old Testament and the saints in the New are together the one people of God.

Worship with instruments does not appear to have been a part of the ceremonial law which was abrogated. However, the rules laid down here by David, in terms of how that worship with instruments was to be conducted in that day, are very important to us in our day as well, to rightly regulate our worship, and so they deserve the full attention of each and every local church. David is telling us here, that God’s worship is special to God. It is not simply special to us, in terms of our personal preferences. In other words, David is telling us that we should not take our cues from worldly and ungodly men on how we should play our songs. They play for their own pleasure. We sing and we play for God’s pleasure.

It does not appear anywhere in the New Testament Scriptures that musical instruments ought to be prohibited altogether from either private or public worship. If this were true, then surely an apostle would have written concerning it. But it is evident, according to many New Testament principles, that we should be wise and do what is appropriate to our worship in terms of the instruments that we use. We should use discretion in choosing what instruments to use in every service of that we hold. For instance, should we have crashing cymbals in our worship, simply because it says that David ordered that the Old Testament people of God play with crashing cymbals in Psalm 150, verse 5? No, probably not, in the vast majority of our services. Should we prohibit cymbals altogether because they were sometimes in Old Testament times loud or crashing? No, it is not necessary to do that, but it would probably not be wise to say that

loudness in instrumentation in worship would be a good thing. It should be evident that this would not be conducive to true and meaningful, God-glorifying worship in an appropriate and reverent sense. Why? Because the congregation would be drowned out. Our Biblical reasoning, according to New Testament instruction should lead us to have the congregational singing be the loudest thing heard. Let it not be drowned out by the instruments, because congregational singing is that which is commanded in the New Testament Scriptures!

Let us study to seek to know what would please God in every situation of worship. In Psalm 149, verse 1, David says – “Praise the Lord!” “Sing praise in the assembly of the saints.” “Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.” This is how we ought to be, my beloved brethren, in all of our worship of God and Christ. In most cases, great simplicity of instrumentation, and great joy and rejoicing in the congregational singing; that is what God is looking for from us. What about the words of verse 3 of Psalm 149 – “Let them praise God in the dance; let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp?” Well, it is evident from the incident of Israel’s history of the golden calf, that both God and Moses were very displeased when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the 2 tablets of the law in his hands, and he heard the sound of music and dancing. The people were obviously sinning. Surely social dancing should never take place in the church.

There were times of dancing that were holy in Old Testament times, such as David’s dancing before the ark in 2nd Samuel 6: 14. The dancing in the texts in Psalm 149: 3 and 150: 4 are probably speaking of leaping for joy over the victories which God gave them over their enemies. But no such dancing needs to take place in New Testament worship because our victories have been established for us through Christ’s coming and His suffering for us. Ours is the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We can leap for joy. We may know that He has turned our mourning into dancing, in our soul and in our spirit, without having to act this out in any kind of dancing in the church. We did not win the battle, but he did. This should humble us, and cause us to praise Him with reverent fear.

But we should not think it strange or unrighteous to sing praises with the musical instruments which would be appropriate to our worship each Lord’s Day; that is, the piano or stringed instruments and flutes. I have even seen trumpets used in worship to the glory of God at times as well. Does more than one instrument have to be used in worship? Well, evidently we do not think so here in our church! We play with two flutes every other Sunday! Indeed, it may be, that on most occasions of worship, that the one or two instruments that we do use, may actually be more conducive to reverent worship, because it does not override the voices of the saints, but it complements them. In fact, even just singing acapella, I am sure, would be fine if someone can lead the congregation in that way.

It is true that we must be careful that we not promote a fleshly or worldly rejoicing, rather than a God-centered rejoicing, through instruments, or the music, and words that we sing. We must always remember that it is God who we are aiming to please, and not simply ourselves. In other words, in terms of our composed songs and hymns and spiritual songs, they should have good and reverent melody, and the use of instrument or instruments, should be done skillfully. And just as important, they should reflect the “new song” requirement of true worship. Verse 3 says – “Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy.” That is, the songs which we compose for worship should have words related to God’s holy word concerning the truth of His great Being, the glory of the gift of Christ, and the grace that He purchased for all of His saints, when He was on the cross. They should exalt God and not men, and our songs should speak specifically of the truths of knowing God and serving God, and what Christ has done for us in His righteous life and sacrificial death.

You will notice that for exclusive Psalmists, they will never sing the name of Jesus in Public Worship. For that reason, if there were no other, I could never be an exclusive

Psalmist. Listen to Colossians 3: 16 and 17 – “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Notice how neither singing in the name of the Lord Jesus, or playing instruments in the public worship is forbidden. Paul does not seem to have been an exclusive Psalmist. He simply says – Whatever you do in the public worship, teaching one another or admonishing one another in the worship of song, make sure that it is done in the name of Christ. This kind of praise, this kind of rejoicing is beautiful to Him. And listen to Ephesians 5: 18 – “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, signing and making melody in your heart to the Lord...” Our songs of worship it appears, are best when they are distinctly melodic, and whatever instruments accompany it, should complement that.

2nd – In the Lord’s Supper we rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ who has given us a New Song to sing.

Verse 3 – “Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy.” And verse 20 – “Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield.” Engaging your own heart to praise God and to rejoice in Him always, shows that you are willing to wait upon Him, every day, for everything that you need. It is a new song that you sing, as a believer in Christ. Still it is something that the Christian learns over time. The old things are passing away, behold all things are new. The Christian learns to sing this new song by remembering what it cost Christ to purchase the grace for them, not only to be forgiven, but also to live the Christian life to the glory of God. Over the course of our Christian life, we learn the valuable lesson of what it means to wait upon God continually. Psalm 25: 4 says – “Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths.” “Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day.”

Is this you, dear Christian? For this is what Christ died for. He died so that you would have the grace to wait upon Him all the day. What He gives is always best. The answers to all your prayers in accord with the will of God for your life, are all there for Him to answer. But it is always in His time, and it is always in accordance with the things that He wants to teach you. How great and blessed a thing it is to know God, and to be loved by Him in and through Christ! How much we need to remember that Christ died to be your greatest Helper, you’re your most powerful shield, from sin, and death, and the Devil and hell! He is your strong Redeemer. He has given you the greatest help that you could ever ask for. He has purchased your salvation on the cross at great cost to Himself. He has shed His precious blood, and He shielded you there from the wrath of God that would have fallen on you forever, had He had not intervened.

We are now going to rejoice in Him corporately together in this special way, through partaking of these elements of the bread and the juice. Our hearts rejoice in Him continually because we have trusted in His holy name, as David says in verse 21. You have called upon the name of the Lord Jesus for salvation, and God has granted it to you for His sake. And so now, unitedly as the body of Christ, we pray and we cry out to our God – “Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we hope in You.