

He Hath Put a New Song in My Mouth

Psalm 40:1–8, Colossians 3:12–17

The title of the message this morning is taken from the King James Version: “He Hath Put a New Song in My Mouth” (Ps. 40:3). This is the version from which I originally learned it.

There is a lot in our two texts, but this morning we are going to focus on singing; specifically, “He hath put a new song in my mouth” (Ps. 40) and “singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3).

The beginning of Psalm 40 is David’s testimony. He has been delivered from multiple dangers, even death. The words used in the original evoke the image of a “dark, subterranean cavern ... where roaring cataracts of water broke in upon him, overwhelming him on every side, till, as it is expressed in the 18th psalm, ‘God sent from above and took him, and drew him out of many waters.’”¹ Humanly speaking, there was no escaping; his feet were as it were stuck in a miry bog. But God delivered him, against overwhelming odds. The ESV renders it: “He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.” God has delivered his servant, and in response he testifies, “He has put a new song in my mouth.” David will sing of God’s deliverance.

In our Colossians text the apostle Paul writes of the Christian graces that God has put into the regenerate heart: tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, love, peace, thankfulness. These graces are not merely bottled up in the heart, they are expressed in actions. Those who exemplify these graces are no longer self-centered but genuinely caring. They love God, and they love their fellow-Christians. As the saints gather together, the word of Christ is on their lips as they teach and admonish one another with Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. The hearts of God’s people are to be full of Scripture, and as they open their lips they can’t help but express it. The Lord’s song is in their hearts. They sing the Lord’s song in a strange land. It is a testimony to an unbelieving world: this present life is not all there is; eternity is coming!

The born-again child of God cannot help but sing. He was lost—spiritually dead, living for self—but God got a hold of him. He brought him from death to life, from darkness to light. He gave him a new heart, and all of a sudden he understood the gospel. Whereas before, he loved sin and followed the devil, now he loves God and desires to live for him. When God says, “Love me with all your heart, soul, mind and strength,” he replies, “Yes, this is what I want more than anything else, Lord. I love you. I want to live for you, worship you, serve you. I want to be in your presence more than anything.” When God says, “I have put a

¹ Calvin on Ps. 40, translator’s note, citing Bishop Mant

new song in your mouth,” the born-again child of God agrees: “Yes, you have put a new song in my mouth, and I want to use my mouth to sing it. Lord, I will sing for you!”

Our New Testament text tells us to sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. Grace is unmerited favor. God owes no one salvation. If he had let all the fallen sons and daughters of Adam perish eternally in their sins, he would have been perfectly just. No one could say to him, “God, you’re not fair.” All of us who died in Adam were equally undeserving. We had fallen short of God’s standard of absolute perfection. But God had mercy on us. He rescued us from certain destruction. He lifted us out of the miry clay and set our feet upon a rock. He put a new song in our mouth, and as we gather for worship, we can’t help but sing! “Take my voice, and let me *sing*, always, only, for my King. Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.”

In the Roman Catholic Church before the Reformation, the priests performed worship. The mass was said in Latin, a language the common people did not understand. With the exception of the choir, the people were there as observers. Christ, they were told, was resacrificed every time the mass was performed. The people came up to receive the host, which they had been taught was the very body of Christ, but that was their only participation in the service; otherwise, they were simply observers. But the Reformation changed all that. With the Reformation came the recovery of congregational singing. The people had a part to play in worship. With the Reformation, the whole congregation became the choir, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to the Lord. The Lord’s song was in their hearts—in their mouths and on their lips.

In the present day, congregational singing has fallen on hard times. In many churches today, worship has devolved into a concert. The professionals are up on stage; the worship band predominates. The spotlights and the microphones are on the performers; the audience is secondary. But this is not the vision of Colossians 3. Verse 16 is addressed to all the people: “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.” The “you” here is plural. This is for all the people. This is something which the church ought to recover. If you are born again, then the Lord has put a new song in your mouth, even praise to God. If you belong to Christ, that it is your duty and privilege to sing with grace to the Lord. God’s people are to be steeped in Scripture. The word of Christ is to dwell in all of us, not just a few. It should flow out of our mouths in song.

How do God’s people learn God’s truth? Not passively—not in listening only—but through singing. This is a powerful truth. Here is the power of music. Why do we sing the ABCs? Why do we remember the lyrics of advertising jingles? Why do

popular songs stick in our minds? When we sing, we connect with the Word emotionally; it is more than mere theoretical propositions; it is something we experience; it comes alive for us.

When our children were little Norma and I composed many Scripture songs. We would set words of Scripture to music and sing them at home or when we were in the car. Some of those songs we sing to our grandchildren even today. It was not great music, but it was useful in conveying truth. Are children having trouble memorizing a Bible verse? Set it to music! It does not have to be great music, just something serviceable. When Micah was born, Joanna made up a little tune, “Micah Daniel, how we love you,” incorporating the famous words from the book of Micah, “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” Now, whenever we see the little fellow we instinctively break out into a rendition of Micah’s song, and it thrills our hearts to see him rivet his attention on our eyes, mouths and lips. He is learning the Scriptures—something we pray for all our church’s covenant children from their earliest years. In society at large there is a famine of hearing the words of the Lord—but we cannot let that happen in the church. We must always be a word-centered church, where the word of Christ predominates. The Word must always be taught from the pulpit, prayed in the public prayers, and sung on the people’s lips and so permeate our hearts. God has put a new song in his peoples’ mouths.

So here, then, is the teaching of Scripture. If you are born again, then our Father has put a new song in your mouth, even praise to our God. If you are born again, then you will want to approach worship not as a passive observer, but as one who joyfully sings with grace in your heart to the Lord. If the song of praise to our God is lacking from your lips, and if you refuse to sing his praises, then are you really born again? This is not merely a theoretical question, for unless you are born again, you are lost; you cannot see or enter into the kingdom of God.

Our highest duty, as we saw a few weeks ago, is to love God. We are to love him with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. We cannot love him unless we are born again. And the way that we express our love for God is through worship. “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker” (Ps. 95:6). God says, “Worship.” He doesn’t say, “*Observe* worship.” There is a difference! He doesn’t say, “Watch while other people worship.” He wants you to actively worship him. He wants you to participate. One way that we worship is through singing. God says, “Sing.” He doesn’t qualify it. He doesn’t say, “Sing, if you have a good voice.” He doesn’t say, “Sing, if you have a trained voice.” He doesn’t say, “Sing if you feel like it.” He says, “Sing.” This is a command. It is a *divine* command.

The other day when I was downtown I pulled to the side of the street to drop someone off. In front of me was a sign that said, “No parking.” I was not parking; I

was just stopping momentarily to let someone off. As far as I was concerned, I was not breaking the law. But when I looked out my window, there was a parking enforcement vehicle. The lady inside rolled down her window and pointed to the sign. I said, "I just stopped to let someone out." She said, "If a bus pulled around the corner, you would be in its way." Now I could have argued, but instead, I moved my car. Looking back, I believe that was a wise decision.

But here in Scripture, it is not a parking enforcement officer who's giving a command. It is God Almighty! There is no higher authority in the universe.

I could have taken my case to a judge. I could have said, "I did not violate the law. I was not parking. My motor was still running. I never got out of my car." I might win in court, but then, I might not. I decided it was not worth the risk.

Someday, you're going to stand before the Lord of all the earth, the God who created you, and you're going to give account. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). *You* are going to be there. *I* am going to be there. People who believe in Jesus are going to be there. People who *don't* believe in Jesus are going to be there. Everyone is going to be there. Nobody's going to have a choice whether to be there or not. You will give account.

God's says, "Worship." He says, "Sing." He is the Lord of the universe, and he has every right to make such a demand. Moreover, it is an appropriate demand. He is the Creator, we are his creatures. He is the one who gave us life and breath. He is the one who gives us all things to enjoy. He is the one who lets us live on his beautiful earth.

The other day I saw a couple minutes of a basketball game. One of the players was dribbling the ball right under the other team's basket. He dribbled there for a long time. He was so skillful, no one on the other team could get the ball away from him. The announcer said, "He's been there so long, he's going to have to start paying rent."

Wherever we are in this world, we have to pay rent. This is *God's* world. He is the absolute owner. We owe him absolutely everything. God wants you to participate in worship to the best of your ability. Another person might not want you to worship. Your participation might annoy him or embarrass him. He might even taunt you: "Don't sing, it's not cool!" Maybe you might feel embarrassment if you were to sing. But ask yourself: whom do you want to please? Another person, or God? Your friend might think it's not cool to worship, but you're not going to stand before your friend at the final day; your friend's opinion will not matter. You won't be able to say to God, "I couldn't sing your praises; my friends didn't think that was cool."

God wants you to worship to the best of your ability. If you are a little baby, your mother might give you a toy to play with to keep you quiet during worship. But when you get a little older, you must put away childish things. Your job is to

participate in worship, not give in to distractions. Your thoughts are to be on God, not on your play.

When I was in school, sometimes my mind would wander. I would begin thinking pleasant thoughts about something far, far away. I had a teacher who had a gift for catching wandering minds. Sometimes she would ask a surprise question about something she had just said, and I had no idea what she was talking about. There I was, put on the spot; I was called to account, and I came up short. God is a God who judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. You cannot fool him. He knows exactly what's in your heart. If it's something else besides him, he knows that.

Now you may think you're safe, sitting here in church. You know nobody's going to call on you, nobody's going to administer a surprise quiz. But someday there *will* be a quiz. It won't be a surprise quiz. God has already forewarned you that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). That's the Bible. God has given us fair warning. There's going to be a final accounting.

If your teacher catches you with a surprise quiz, you may be embarrassed, you may wish had been better prepared. But someday your inattentiveness during God's worship will be known to the whole world. Jesus said, "I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36). If you were idling away your time, thinking about the things of this world during worship, the Lord knows. You can't fool him.

Some of our covenant children know the songs of this world more than the songs of Zion. This is tragic! For if they listen to the songs of this world, they may adopt the mindset and behavior of the world. It is not without reason that the apostle warns, "Be not conformed to this world." The other day I heard about a homeschooling mom who is brokenhearted that one of her older sons has moved out of the house and is not following the Lord. She loves her son. She had high hopes for him. She raised him to love God. But he does not love God. He is following the prince of darkness. He is acting like a child of hell. The promise is there: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). I'm sure this mom claims that promise. But she cannot regenerate her child's heart. He himself must choose. It is tragic when a covenant child follows the song of the world rather than the songs of Zion.

What kind of music do you listen to? Whatever style you prefer, it must pass the test of Scripture: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and

if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8). Music that glorifies sin and rebellion and leads us away from God is forbidden.

The Christian is always to cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Why should we fill our minds with songs that promote lust, rebellion, self-centeredness, consumerism, cruelty, drugs or immorality? The world says, “Be true to yourself; this is the way to happiness.” The Bible says, “Be true to God; seek Christ and his kingdom first; *this* is the way to happiness.” If we live for self, we will never find happiness. The pleasures of sin last only for a season, but God’s truth abides forever. If we intentionally seek Christ and his kingdom first, the Bible promises that “all these things” will be added to us (Matt. 6:33). The message is clear: Do you want to be happy? Put Christ first. You will be happier than you ever could imagine!

Do you sing the songs of Zion? In a lot of churches, only the women sing. The not-so-subtle message is that singing is only for sissies: real *men* do not sing! Covenant children need to see both their father and their mother singing the songs of Zion, joyfully and wholeheartedly. They need to hear them singing at family devotions. They need to hear them singing at church. They need to hear them singing as they work and play and drive down the road. Paul and Silas sang at midnight as they languished in the hold of the Philippian jail. Thrust into the inner prison, their feet held fast in the stocks, unable to move their legs or get into a comfortable position, “at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and *sang* praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them” (Acts 16:25). For them, singing God’s praises was not something done out of a grudging obedience just during public assemblies but something that flowed out of hearts grateful for God’s great salvation. Has the Spirit of God put a new song in your mouth? Then sing with grace in your heart to the Lord! This is the word of the Lord. Will you obey?

If the Lord Jesus Christ were here in person today, would he join in singing, or would he say, “I’ll leave the singing up to others; I’ll just sit in silence.” I think you know the answer. The book of Hebrews has Christ saying, “in the midst of the assembly I will *sing praise* to you” (Heb. 2:12). Think of it! In the public worship of the church the second Person of the Holy Trinity sings praise to God. And when we sing God’s praises in his church, he, with his holy angels, sings with us. Heaven is a place filled with singing, and earth should be as well. Why does he who is God incarnate sing the praises of God? If he did not, he would be an idolater. As creatures we worship him who is higher than ourselves, but there is no one higher than God.

In heaven the redeemed sing the praises of the Lamb who was slain—the one who became us, so that he might redeem us to God by his blood. If you are trusting

in Christ, then he has redeemed you to God by his blood. It is altogether appropriate that you should lift your voice in worship.

If you've never opened up your mouth to sing before, now is a good time to begin. You've heard the word of God: "he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise to our God. ... 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." Pray for grace to obey; God will richly reward you.

"Let those refuse to sing that never knew our God"—but children of the heavenly King will sing his praises now and forever. Amen.