

The Prisoners Were Listening

James 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

- Pain and prayer. Happy and hymns. Prayers and songs soothe the soul, reach the ears of the Lord, and build a bridge between us and our Creator. You could neglect prayer in the privacy of your home. You could refrain from singing alone, and who would know? But it says something about our relationship with God. Does God comfort you? Does God warm our hearts? Do we look at Him as a protector and provider? Do we love Him?

Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

- If we haven't experienced the blessing of prayer and song, we'll not see its value when we sing or pray together. Paul and Silas seem to be men who appreciated the invitation to speak to God through prayer and song and the mutual edification of doing so together. It comforted them. It gave them the opportunity to express their love and joy in the Lord. And guess what . . . others were listening.
- Others will listen to you this morning. Others will observe your behavior today. What will they see? What do they learn about you? Paul & Silas weren't in prison, you see. They were the only ones present that night who were free.
- Today, we're considering the beauty of singing, and two passages in particular instruct and encourage me.

Ephesians 5:15–21 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Colossians 3:12–17 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 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. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

- Ephesians and Colossians are called the "Twin Epistles" because of their similar passages, as illustrated above. These verses are typically referenced when explaining why we sing together in worship, but to be fair, Paul doesn't focus on orderly worship in these sections

of scripture. Actually, when you consider the full context, much of what he's instructing would be carried out on a personal level. It's about how you walk. It's about being separated from the world and led by God (Ephesians). It's about your heart towards others - your love and humility. It's about forgiveness and peace. However, I think we can agree that it would have application when they gathered together, as we have today.

- We're bringing our hearts today. We're offering our thankfulness. We're . . .
 - To be filled with the Spirit. We're not to "get drunk with wine" but "be filled with the Spirit." This is a choice we make. We don't turn to social norms or physical comforts. We are to let the word of God into our hearts. It reminds me of Romans 8:12-14.
 - Addressing/teaching/admonishing one another. Yes, our songs are often directed to God, but they also address each other. We instruct one another. Do you think about that? This is about instructing, warning, and informing. You see this in passages such as Ezra 3:11. The ESV says "responsively." Historically, we learn that "call and response" was a common style 2,000 ago. Today, this will happen when we sing:
 - Holy to the Lord and 10,000 Angels. We're calling each other to be holy people. We're reminding people what Jesus could have done the night He was betrayed. It's teaching you what happened with the implication of looking inward. He's done His part for us - what about you? What about me?
 - Singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Yes, today we'll have a spiritual song (As the Deer) and then a literal Psalm (Psalm 19), which reminds us of the beauty in God's word (right before we read Jeremiah 7).
 - Making melody in our hearts to God with thanksgiving. Hymns are understood to be songs of praise. That's what we'll begin with - a song of praise to God. It will be from the heart with thankfulness. Will that be true of you? And I love that we do it with melody. Melody, the song part, is what makes this different. Songs are so essential. Not only are they a powerful tool in teaching (suitable for kids or those who can't read, but you can memorize them), but they are also an opportunity to stir the soul and emotions. So many of the Psalms came from David's heart. He played a song to the Lord. Our worship of God, whether it be in private or together, should be from the heart. What about you? What about right now? Because it's time. And right now, we're going to say something - Our God, He is alive! Let's say something! Let's praise Him together! Let's be thankful and acknowledge our Creator!

Final thoughts: in our assembly, we will have listeners. Some may be spiritual prisoners, while others are not. What will they hear? What will we be saying? Brethren, what lives will we lead after we depart and lead our separate lives? What will that say about our belief in God? Let's all sing with sincerity, which will impact how we walk!