

SERMON: THIS AIN'T NO TIME TO SING THE BLUES

Psalm 103:1-5

Psalm 103:20-22

(1) Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy Name. (2) Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: (3) Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases; (4) Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; (5) Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

(20) Bless the Lord, ye angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His Word. (21) Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure. (22) Bless the Lord, all His works in all places of His dominion: Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Introduction

There is a beautiful story about the late, iconic, blues singer B.B. King. He always made time in his busy schedule to attend his family reunion in Mississippi. At each reunion they would have a talent show and B.B. would put the metaphorical icing on the cake by singing several of his hit songs. People who were not members of the family would also attend the talent show to see their successful home boy perform. They would get a free show that others across the globe would have to pay for. He always brought his band with him. This time it was different. When he grabbed Lucille, his guitar and began to sing, he did not sing any of his well-known hit songs. He began with *God Has Smiled On Me*. Then He sang *We've Come This Far By Faith*. After singing many other songs of praise, he ended with the hymn *Count Your Blessings*. There was great bewilderment and amazement as to the change in an unwritten tradition. The church folk were also stunned and amazed, but began to sing along with him in a worshipful manner.

At the conclusion of his performance he said something like this: "After seeing our family, from the elders to the little bitty babies, mingling in love, a deep attitude of gratitude came over me. There is so much love and joy floating around here. We are here for a reunion. We are not here for a funeral. I said to myself, this ain't the time to sing the blues. This is the time to sing praises to God and give Him thanks. The Bible says there is a time for everything under the sun, but in my opinion, this ain't no time to sing the blues. This is the time to celebrate the goodness of God and to thank Him for His grace and His mercy."

Allow me to digress for moment, before I mislead you and you think I am speaking disparagingly about the blues. I am not. Blues is part of our culture. It has its place. It was really therapeutic. It was a way to articulate our suffering and ventilate so we could endure the hardships of oppression. Like the spirituals and jazz, blues combined structure with spontaneity and improvisation. It was and is a true art form. It has its own unique musical scale and accepted chord progressions. It has influenced our culture in so many ways. A case in point: we usually conclude the singing of *Happy Birthday* with the phrase, "And many more." The melodic tone on "more" is a blue note. Notes like that were originally called blues notes and was shortened to blue notes. The blues singers added that little "coda" to *Happy Birthday*. The blues is a true American genre. You can hear blues motifs in rhythm and blues, in rock and roll, in country, in jazz, and definitely in gospel music.

Now back to my main theme. As we celebrate what Victor Pence, the former pastor of Peachtree Presbyterian Church, calls Thanksmas- the period from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day- let us take up the attitude of B. B. King and say, "This ain't no time to sing the blues." This is the time to count our blessings and give God our best praise and worship Him for who He is. Just think about it: one of the greatest blues singers of all times, who made millions singing the blues, said there are times when it is totally inappropriate to sing the blues. Wow! – or should I say, Amen? There are times when only songs and hymns of praise are appropriate. There are times when only positive thoughts should be allowed to enter minds.

I am not insensitive to what many of us are going through right now. Many of us will experience for the first time the holidays without a loved one present. Still I want you to cherish the pleasant memories and thank God for the time you spent with them. See if you can muster up enough spiritual strength to make a truce with your grief and enjoy this time with those who are still physically present with you. Remember, we can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us.

Now let's look at our Scripture from a broad, high level view. The book of Psalms, as many of us know, is the Hebrew's hymn book. In fact, it is five hymns books concatenated. Many of the melodies are lost, but thank God, we have the lyrics. There are many types of psalms, but this psalm is a psalm of adoration and thanksgiving. The Hebrew title of the book of Psalms is "*Sepher Tehillim*," which literally means "book of praises." While there are psalms of lament, imprecatory psalms, and didactic psalms, the overarching theme is the praise of God; so the Hebrew title is befitting. Let's take a closer look at a few of the verses of this psalm.

Exposition

1. David Talked To His Soul.

(He Told His Soul To Bless/Praise God.)

(Discipline Is The Ability To Tell Yourself To Do The Right Thing
And Then Do It.)

(Accurate Self-Awareness Is One Important Key To Success.)

2. David Counted His Blessings.

(The Miracles and The Maintenance.)

(The Divine Deliverance And The Daily Bread.)

(He Did Not Complain- At This Time.)

3. David Did Not Ask God For Anything At That Time.

(He Thanked God for What God Has Already Done for Him.)

4. David Calls On Others To Join In The Song of Praise.

(There Is Corporate Celebration And Private Prayer And Praise.)

(Both Are Essential.)

(Neither Must Be Overemphasized To The Exclusion Of The Other.)

Closing Thoughts

In this psalm, David reminded himself of the blessing of God so he would continue to be grateful for all that God has done. He did not want his gratitude to be superficial. This is really an “all or none” phenomenon. Notice the “alls” in this psalm: “all that is within me,” “all His benefits,” “all thine iniquities,” “all thy diseases.” At the conclusion of this psalm, David called on the entire heavenly host and all of God’s creative works to join Him in praise. Give God Glory! Give God All the Glory!

End Notes

1. The word bless in the Hebrew is “barak.” It is strong’s reference number 1288. The pronunciation is, “baw-rack.” It means literally to “kneel in front of.” When we bless God we symbolically kneel before Him in adoration, thanksgiving, and praise. When God blesses us we kneel to receive something good offered to us by Him.

2. A good book to read about the origin of the blues is the classic by James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and The Blues*.

3. B.B. King taught another great lesson. We all have limitations and we must learn to be successful in spite of them. He could not play his guitar and sing at the same time. So he would write songs in which he did both, but not at the same time. It was so smooth that most folks did not notice it until he told them. If you can sing and play a musical instrument simultaneously, you have a gift that God did not give B.B. King, the king of the blues. So give God a great “hallelujah” and thank Him every day.

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