

# The Songs of Zion: What Shall the Church Sing?

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Editorial Note: That the Church should sing Psalms in public worship would seem the natural understanding of two New Testament texts: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:18-19) and “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” (Col. 3:16). Historically this was the practice during most of the last two millennia. Catholics sang them—latterly to Gregorian Chants. Anglicans chanted them in (mainly) Coverdale’s beautiful version and Reformed and Presbyterians sang them in a variety of metrical versions. The rise of nonconformity in England made no difference—Psalms continued as the main vehicle of praise.

Undoubtedly some hymns (using that word in its usual sense) existed and were variously included—both Roman Catholics and Anglicans sang the Te Deum and other parts of Scripture such as the Magnificat and Benedictus.

It was not until the eighteenth century that significant numbers of hymns were included in the worship. John Gill’s Baptist congregation added a hymn at the end of worship so that those who objected could depart before its singing! What then seems to have happened is a sort of Gresham’s Law of singing. Just as “bad money drives out good” so the hymns drove out the Psalms. Then Sankey drove out Watts and Wesley and latterly one’s soul was tried with increasingly idiotic choruses alleged to be “spiritual songs.”

I remember nearly half a century ago enquiring of brethren why they did not sing Psalms in worship and getting a reply in effect that it was perhaps too Anglican! Perhaps the question of whether it was scriptural would have been more apposite.

However one result of the ferment caused by the rediscovery of the Reformed Faith c. 1950 is a renewed interest in biblical worship. Churches have come into existence emphasizing an expository ministry and biblical worship—and naturally that has raised the issue of sung praise. Pamphlets have come out arguing for exclusive psalmody. M. C. Ramsay, *Psalms Only*; G. I. Williamson, *The Singing of Psalms in the Worship of God*; W. Gary Crampton, *Thoughts on Exclusive Psalmody*; and more recently on the other side Kenneth Dix, *The Praises of God in Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs* and Iain Murray, *The Psalter—the Only Hymnal?* All this is to be wholly welcomed—but one would like to ask whether some of those who oppose exclusive psalmody regularly include any Psalms in their worship?

It is, however, possible for those of us who do sing Psalms [exclusively or regularly] to do so unmeaningfully. Why do we sometimes break up a short metrical Psalm after say three stanzas—as if there was some need—when another two minutes would suffice to sing the whole as surely originally intended! The Anglican practice of chanting, normally a whole Psalm, is not only more accurate but retains the meaning better. The particular merit of Professor Hanko’s paper is that it emphasizes what we are doing practically when we exhort one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

## Introduction

It is my conviction, expressed in this article, that the Word of God requires the exclusive use of the Psalms in the corporate worship of the church.

The assumption here is the regulative principle of worship, defined in the *Heidelberg Catechism*: “What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word” (Q & A 96).

I shall not argue the case for the regulative principle in corporate worship, nor shall I make any attempt to explain it in detail; knowledge of these ideas is presupposed on the part of the reader. If there is any question about these things, material can be found in many places written by many different men.

It is the thesis of this article that the regulative principle of worship requires the use of the Psalms in the church’s worship.

## The Argument From History

Although it is of greatest concern to me to demonstrate in this article how Scripture requires exclusive psalmody, I shall digress momentarily and point out a few facts from the history of the church.

Anyone who is at all acquainted with the history of the church, especially since the time of the Reformation, will know that exclusive psalmody in the worship services acts as a deterrent to the introduction of heresy into the pulpit.

It is equally true that the singing of songs other than the Psalms opens the door, not only to liturgical innovation, but also to unbiblical preaching.

It is not difficult to understand the reason for this. Preaching and singing both belong to worship. *Worship, when it is truly worship in the presence of God, requires harmony and agreement between preaching and singing.* It is preposterous to imagine that a congregation can listen in a satisfied way to heresy in preaching while singing the songs of Scripture. And it is equally preposterous to think that the church which has abandoned the Psalms will long be satisfied with sound, orthodox preaching.

I am not saying by this that there cannot be found some hymns (by which I mean songs other than those based on the Psalms) which express certain truths of God's Word. But true biblical and Reformed preaching is *theocentric*; i.e., it begins and ends with God and His glory. Hymns may express themes which are biblical and truths which are orthodox, but the body of hymns taken as a whole are either anthropocentric or wrongly Christocentric, but not theocentric. And to be God-centred is to be orthodox.

It is undoubtedly for this reason that already in the sixteenth century it was said of the Arminians that they sang their way into the church, for Arminian error flew into the church on the wings of songs other than the Psalms. And this has been the pattern since those days.

Someone phrased it correctly when he said: "Let me make the ballads of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws."

The close relation between the preaching and the singing in the church is underscored by the fact that when reformation came to the church, such reformation always included a return to the singing of Psalms. Apostasy which brought with it the desperate need of reformation was apostasy in doctrine, in church government, and in liturgy. Reformation was a return to the "old paths" (Jer. 6:16) in doctrine, church polity, and liturgy, and thus in singing by Jehovah's congregation. Psalm-singing is a part of these "old paths."

### Direct Biblical Proof

Such proof from history, however, is not sufficient to make Psalm-singing in the worship services an element incorporated into the regulative principle of worship. For that we need to go to Scripture itself.

The strong line of biblical proof which we need can be found in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Before the argument from the Old Testament is laid down I must once more make an assumption clear on which the scriptural argument is based. The assumption is that the church of the old dispensation and the church of the new dispensation are one church of Christ; and that, therefore, an injunction for worship given in the old dispensation is binding on the church of the new dispensation as well.

It has been argued, even by those who will agree that the church is one in all ages, that nevertheless a command concerning worship given to the church which lived in the times of types and shadows is not valid for the church today simply because the worship of God was bound to the temple and the rituals and ceremonies of Old Testament times, while the church today is free through the Spirit of Christ.

There is a certain superficial validity to the argument, but it is not difficult to see that, carried out consistently, the argument would make irrelevant to the church today the entire moral law embodied in the ten commandments.

The point here (a point which I do not intend to argue in detail) is that, while the *form* of the administration of God's covenant with His people (in the context of which worship took place) was changed with the fulfillment of the types and shadows, the substance remains intact and binding on the church today as well as on the saints of the older times.

This is especially true of the command to sing the Psalms, for the Psalms themselves belong to that which is the possession of the church of all ages. The Psalms are part of Scripture, and Scripture, also the Old Testament, is still today our rule of faith and life.

The argument, briefly stated, is as follows.

In II Samuel 23:1-2, David claims that he is God's instrument in preparing music for the church:

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the

anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel said, the Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.

One or two points are to be noticed here. David claims for himself divine inspiration to such an extent that God's Word was in his tongue by the Spirit; and that the words he consequently spoke, he spoke as the psalmist of Israel. That is, he spoke for purposes of giving the church her songs.

That this was recognized in Israel, and that the Psalms were sung by God's command, is evident from the great reformation which took place during the time of Hezekiah, king of Judah. As a part of that reformation, Hezekiah restored to the church the pure worship of God. II Chronicles 29:25 reads:

And [Hezekiah] set Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets.

Again, one ought to notice in this passage that David, along with Gad and Nathan, and so by divine revelation, determined every detail of the worship of God that was to take place in the temple. When Hezekiah brought reformation to the church, he restored the divinely ordained pattern of worship given to the church through David, Gad, and Nathan. It was by divine ordinance that this worship was ordered.

Although verse 25 does not mention the singing, verses 27 and 28 do:

And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

But the text is even more specific. We are told in verse 30:

Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Nothing is clearer than this. Scripture enjoins Psalm singing in the worship of the church.

### **Covenantal Worship and Covenantal Psalms**

The third line of argumentation must be made from the character of the Psalms themselves. My argument here is that the Psalms are deliberately inspired by God to be covenantal in form because worship itself is, in the deepest sense, covenantal.

In order to make this point it is necessary to go first of all to the New Testament Scriptures and pay attention to two passages, well-known and usually quoted in the debate over exclusive psalmody. They are the passages in Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16.

Ephesians 5:18-19 reads (we take here the more correct translation of the RV):

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

Colossians 3:16 reads:

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 unto the Lord.

Here again I must point out that I am arguing on the basis of an assumption which I do not intend to prove. That assumption is that the three words used in both passages (psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs)

refer together to the Old Testament Psalter found in the 150 psalms.

If anyone questions that, I refer such a one to the literature on the question, which is vast and compelling and which is prepared by scholars who know more about the formal aspects of the Hebrew Psalter than I.

I call attention to one point only. The use of three words to describe one document is not strange to the Scriptures. One example will suffice. In I Kings 6:12 the three words, statues, judgments, and commandments, are all direct references to the law of God, though each word looks at God's law from a slightly different viewpoint. So psalms and hymns and spiritual songs all refer to the book of Psalms, though each word conveys a slightly different idea concerning them.

Before I turn to these passages to point out their significance for the question we face concerning singing in corporate worship, I think it important to point out that the passage in Ephesians emphatically speaks of the Holy Spirit as making it possible to sing in corporate worship: "be filled with the Spirit ..."

Two points have to be made here. The first is rather obvious. The Holy Spirit always works in the hearts of His people in connection with (and never apart from) His own Word which He has given to the church through infallible inspiration. If the Holy Spirit alone makes singing in corporate worship possible, then the Holy Spirit will use His own Word in the work of enabling the people of God to sing. That Word is found in the Psalms.

The second point is not so obvious; at least, no one seems to call attention to it. The question arises: Why does Paul speak here of the need to be filled with the Spirit?

The answer to that question lies emphatically in the fact that in the new dispensation the *whole* congregation sings, while in the old dispensation the Levites sang.

If you read carefully the passages we quoted above from II Chronicles, you will have noticed that the Levites did the singing, not the whole congregation. This changes in the new dispensation.

Why the change? Paul explains that. In the old dispensation the Spirit was not yet poured out, and so the people of God did not possess that

Spirit which made them prophets, priests, and kings in the church. There were special offices of prophets, priests, and kings; and those who held these offices possessed the Spirit, by way of promise of another age to come. The Levites, for their work in the temple, possessed the Spirit. Hence, they did the singing.

But now, with the dawning of another age, an age which begins with Pentecost when the Spirit is poured out upon *all* flesh, all the people of God possess the Spirit. No longer do these saints need the Levites to bring to them the Word of God and sing for them so that the responsibility of “speaking to one another” and “teaching and admonishing one another” falls upon the Levites (See also II Chron. 17:8-9); they now possess the Spirit themselves—and the Spirit’s own words in the Psalms—so that they can speak to one another and teach and admonish one another.

But these remarks are a bit of a parenthesis. I am particularly concerned with the words “speaking to one another” and “teaching and admonishing one another.” This, the apostle says, is characteristic of the corporate worship of the church in her singing. A strange description of singing indeed. I wonder whether we even give any thought to this aspect of singing, even though we sing the Psalms. When we sing the Psalms we are talking to each other; even teaching each other and, of all things, admonishing each other. In singing there is conversation and discussion going on between the saints who are joined in singing. That strikes me as extremely peculiar.

In order to appreciate the force of those startling expressions of the apostle, we must remind ourselves of the *covenantal* nature of worship.

It might not be without purpose to point out, though in passing, that the very nature of the covenant is at stake here. If the covenant is a treaty or pact or agreement based on mutually accepted conditions, stipulations, obligations, and promises, the covenantal character of worship is erased. What is going on in worship is not God and man sitting down to discuss the conditions and obligations of a certain agreement which both hope to realize in time and through discussion.



Worship is profoundly spiritual. God and His people are living together in friendship and fellowship. Worship is the highest expression here on earth of the great truth that the covenant is a living bond of communion between the eternal and living God and the church which He has saved through Christ.

This was already prefigured in the temple, for the temple was a concrete symbol of God and His people dwelling under one roof in covenant fellowship with each other.

In the new dispensation this reality is achieved through Christ's perfect work by which He becomes, in His own body, the temple: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up ..." (John 2:19).

Because worship is the highest expression of God in fellowship with His people, there is a holy conversation going on in the worship, for conversation lies at the heart of fellowship. There is no fellowship where there is no conversation.

In that holy conversation in which God and His people are speaking together, God's speech is always first: first logically, first sovereignly, first creatively, first causatively. Our speech is the effect of which God's speech is the cause.

This is of crucial importance to an understanding of Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3.

There is conversation going on in the worship. God is speaking. And God's people are speaking. God is speaking to the whole congregation; and the congregation, together, is speaking to God—and also to one another; and to one another in the singing. That is what Paul is talking about.

Our worship is, after all, *corporate* worship.

This too, I fear, is often forgotten. As I worship in the holy congregation, I can easily be one individual in a sea of worshipers, thinking about and concerned with my own personal relation to God, and forgetting that I am only one in the corporation of the body of Christ.

This is wrong.

I am reminded of one of Luther's prayers. Luther liked to go through the Lord's Prayer and make a special prayer in connection with each part

of the prayer the Lord gave us. In connection with the very first word of the Lord's Prayer, the word "Our," Luther prayed:

It is also Thy will that we should not individually name Thee Father, but together call Thee our Father and united pray for all. So give us a united love that we may know and consider all to be brothers and sisters. United we ask Thee, our beloved Father, for each and all, even as one child speaks for another to its father. Amen.

The point that needs to be made here is that the singing is carried on by the church in the context and as a part of covenantal worship. The only songs that I know which have about them that covenantal character are the Psalms. They are unique.

I am not arguing that certain free songs can be found which accurately express the truth of Scripture. I can sing with a great deal of enjoyment, "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord," and "Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth." I am not arguing, therefore, that certain free songs are not accurate confessions of the truth of Scripture. I am not even arguing that many free songs are prayers to God set to music.

What I am arguing is that this is *all* free songs are. And that is not enough. The covenantal character of worship must be reflected in the singing of the church. Only the Psalms do that.

A number of years ago, reading the Psalms during our family devotions, I took the time to write down on a slip of paper precisely who was speaking to whom in every part of the Hebrew Psalter. It was an enlightening exercise.

While, of course, in a certain sense of the word God is speaking in every Psalm because the Psalms are inspired by God, nevertheless in some of them God addresses others in direct discourse. God speaks to Christ, e.g., in Psalm 110 and Psalm 89. God speaks to David in Psalm 132:11-18. God speaks to the wicked in Psalms 50:16-23 and 2:6-9, as well as to kings in Psalm 2:10-12a.

But mostly He speaks to His people in a direct way. A few examples will suffice. “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee” (32:8-9). “Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth” (46:10). “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (50:5; see also vv. 6, 7-15).

No free songs do what is unique to the Psalms: a direct address of God to His people. This is essential to covenantal worship.

Sometimes the Psalms are the speech of God’s people to God, in which speech they pour out their hearts in praise and thanksgiving, in prayer and petition, in wonder and awe. These Psalms are to be found everywhere, for the Psalms are often prayers uttered before God’s face. “Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up” (56:1). “Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me” (59:1). “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness ... Against thee, thee only have I sinned ...” (51:1, 4).

Many times the Psalms are didactic, what we could probably call confessions of faith. The full range of the truth is found in the Psalms, and no single truth concerning God in all His works is omitted in this marvelous Psalter. I cannot begin to list those Psalms here which are such confessions, but I can remind you of some of the Psalms which do so in familiar and much-loved words. Psalm 23 is perhaps the very first Psalm which little children learn when they can scarcely lisp the words of the AV: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Psalms 25, 27, 32, 46, 48, 73, and many others arise out of the confident belief of the saints in the truth as it is revealed in Christ.

In many of the Psalms, God’s people are speaking directly to others. The variety of the list is astounding. They speak in the Psalms to workers of iniquity (6:8-9), to their own souls (16:2-3), to Jacob (24:6), to the mighty (29:1-2), to children (34:11-22), to all people (49), to God-fearers (66:16), to judges (85:2-4, 6-7). God’s people have something to say to

just about everyone and everything about God and His works. Where in free songs do you find anything like that?

Sometimes God's people are very conscious of the fact that they speak only what God has first spoken, and they give expression to that: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek" (27:8). And sometimes everyone is talking together and the conversation almost gets so mixed up that one can hardly tell who is talking (Ps. 91:9-16).

In other words, the Psalms are the only book of songs which express all the holy talk that is going on in the intimacies of covenant fellowship between God and His people, and between God's people together.

Now, it is to this latter that Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 refer especially.

It is a little difficult to express this, but the simple fact of the matter is that Paul emphatically states that in singing the Psalms together in church we are speaking to one another, and teaching and admonishing one another.

That is strange language which the apostle uses. How often do we really think of our singing in that fashion? How can that be done when a choir sings instead of the congregation? How does that happen when songs other than the Psalms are being used, Psalms which are written in such a peculiar way that this sort of thing becomes possible?

I am not sure that I understand how corporate singing results in speaking to one another and teaching and admonishing one another. I am not sure I understand the "mystique" of music. Music is a wonderful gift of God. Music does things to people. Music does things to the singer, as well as to the one being sung to. Music is mysterious, ineffable, affecting one in strange and unexpected ways. Music can do things which no other means of communication are capable of doing. I am not sure why this is true.

But it happens when people sing together. I can and often do sing alone, especially when I am driving my car a fairly long distance. It is interesting, edifying, uplifting. Music does that. When we are merry, James says, then we ought to sing Psalms (5:13).

But singing with others is different. Singing with the family around the piano does things to me. Hearing my wife and the children sing together is moving. And this is especially true, as many families have testified, in times of great spiritual crisis—when, e.g., the Lord has taken a loved one from their midst, or when one of the family is in the hospital. Singing communicates between those joined in a song in a way that is different from speaking directly or reading. It is more forceful and affective. It is mysterious. Each is singing to the others.

When the church of Christ comes together, the saints sing together. They sing what God has said, what they want to say together to God, what they must say to all the world about them, what they want to tell each other, what lives in their hearts and souls. And when through song together they speak to each other, they teach and admonish each other as well. The fellowship between God and His people comes to concrete expression in the conversation of singing. The fellowship between the saints which is rooted in the covenant is spoken of freely, joyfully: instructing, comforting, encouraging, teaching, admonishing, and edifying. When I sing Psalm 23 alone in times of great trouble, it is one thing, for I confess before God's face that indeed Jehovah is my Shepherd. But when, in the midst of these troubles, other saints are singing with me, they are also singing to me and telling me that Jehovah is also their Shepherd, and they have never lacked anything, even in their greatest sorrows.

Because the Psalms are so complete in their descriptions of every aspect of God's covenant, they alone can be used in the highest reality of that covenant here on earth, the corporate worship of the church.

### Our Spiritual Biography

The last line of argumentation for exclusive psalmody has to do with another unique feature of the Psalms. The book of Psalms, taken as a whole, constitutes a spiritual biography of the people of God.

Let it be understood what I am saying. The Hebrew Psalter constitutes a biography for *every* child of God; and the Old Testament Psalter constitutes a *complete* biography. That is, not one single element of the spiritual life of any child of God is omitted.

It would take more time than I have to demonstrate this. Nor need it be done. If you have doubts about it, read the Psalms. That's all I can say. I warn you ahead of time, that they are a *spiritual* biography, and you yourself must be a spiritual man or woman to recognize this great truth. But I assure you that it is all there.

You may ask: What does this have to do with Psalm singing and exclusive psalmody in the corporate worship of the church? Well, it has much to do with it; but a few preliminary remarks are in order.

In the first place, by "spiritual biography" I mean something definite and specific. I mean, essentially, that the Psalms are all, in the final analysis, Messianic.

It is true that some Psalms are directly Messianic, and Christ Himself is so clearly speaking in them that He spoke the same words when He was on earth (Ps. 22). Some Psalms unmistakably speak of Christ in a prophetic way, foretelling many things of Christ's suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation, as well as His coming in judgment upon the clouds.

But all are essentially Messianic in the sense that Christ is speaking in all of them of Himself; speaking through His Spirit; speaking of His work, in sometimes unbearably poignant ways.

But, and this is unique also to the Psalms (it cannot be the characteristic of free songs), Christ speaks in the Psalms historically. That is, Christ speaks *through* the sweet singers of Israel, through those who sang and wrote the Psalms, through the church which took the Psalms into their hearts. Christ singing of Himself, yes. But Christ singing of Himself in His glorious relation to His people as their Savior and Redeemer. And so, Christ is singing of Himself as He lives in and through His people and is the great power of all their life from here to glory. Christ is singing in them; and when they sing, He sings through them so that their entire spiritual life is Christ in them.

And that brings up the second point that needs saying, especially because we are talking about the corporate worship of the church.

As I mentioned earlier, in the holy conversation that goes on in worship between God and His people, God takes the initiative. His speech is first and creative. Our speech is the result of God speaking to us.

But let it be understood that in Reformed worship this is exactly why preaching is central to worship. In preaching, God speaks. He speaks to His saints.

But, and here is the point that needs so desperately to be made, God does not speak as a lecturer who wishes to educate His people in a given subject; nor does God speak, as some ministers seem to think, to entertain. God has only one reason for speaking to His people, and that reason is that by His divine and powerful speech, God *saves*.

Nor does God speak to save in a robot-like fashion, so that salvation goes on, while God is speaking, mysteriously, unconsciously, automatically. Nothing of the kind. When preaching is genuinely the speech of God, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the elect to make that very word spoken in preaching effective in the salvation of the sinner. But that very Word preached is made effective by that work of the Holy Spirit when He impresses the Word of God upon the consciousness of each saint. When I speak of the consciousness of each saint, I refer to the saint in all the relationships of life in which he stands and which form a part of his experience as God leads him by His counsel step by step, moment by moment through life, with all its joys and sorrows, burdens and trials, joyful moments and sorrowful times. The believer comes to church as a sinner who has struggled with sin, fallen and broken; he comes out of the life of the week carrying heavy burdens, weary beyond description, thirsting for that which nothing here on earth can satisfy, overwhelmed with problems, caught up in Satan's snares, wounded by fiery darts, in desperate need of help which no man can bring.

God speaks to the believer through Christ; but speaks so that he hears the voice of the Good Shepherd, knows the Shepherd, hears his Shepherd call him *by name* (Jesus says, John 10), and the Spirit speaks that Word preached to the sinning saint in the depths of his consciousness. It is the power of preaching. It is that which makes preaching the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

Christ through the preaching calls: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden." And the Spirit presses that Word on our consciousness so that we become aware of the great burden of our sins and the

weariness it brings. But that same Spirit impresses the call of Christ on our consciousness: “Come to me!” And by the power of the Spirit we say, “He is calling *me!*” And we flee to Him who alone can give rest.

But then, a song is announced. The saints must sing it. They must sing it in response to God’s speech to them. They must express what God has said to them in their own life and calling in the world. Here are these marvelous Psalms. They are, taken together, a divine biography which is all-inclusive, containing everything that is included in the life of the believer, of which the preaching speaks. They are God’s interpretation of what He has done in our lives. They are God’s commentary on what is involved in that glorious work of salvation which is our portion here in the world.

If only we will limit ourselves to God’s explanation of what happens, we will not get involved in our own interpretation (which free songs so often do), nor in fantasy experiences, which characterize so many hymns. But we will say to God and to one another only what God Himself has said, first, to us.

This is, by the way, the answer to a rather serious objection to exclusive psalmody. I refer to the objection of some that the Hebrew Psalter is inadequate to express New Testament truth in all its riches because it is Old Testament truth revealed in types and shadows. We need, so it is said, songs for Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Ascension Day. The Hebrew Psalter is inadequate.

I reject the objection.

The problem is not that the Hebrew Psalter is inadequate. The problem is that we do not take the time to understand what the Psalter given us of God is all about.

The fact that the Psalms are a spiritual biography erases the objection. Although to a certain extent the Psalms do reflect the dispensation of types and shadows, this does not mean that the Psalms are not adequate to express New Testament truth. Again, if you are doubtful of this, read them. As a matter of fact, the Psalms are less Old Testament-like than any other of the Old Testament Scriptures, with the possible exception of Isaiah 53. Where does a particular verse make a truth either obscure or



obsolete, or incomplete, or inadequately developed because it is not written in the context of New Testament revelation and New Testament truth? You say: the Psalms are always talking about sacrifices? So does Romans 12:1-2. You say: The Psalms lack the full expression of the truth of the resurrection, for example. They do? Remember, the Psalms speak of the resurrection of Christ, not only as a historical fact, but they speak of the living Christ in us as we experience His life in our resurrection life. Will not Psalm 16, and, yes, also Psalm 17, do? Peter found it adequate to express the truth of what happened in Joseph's garden. Peter heard Christ saying in Joseph's garden: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor suffer thine holy one to see corruption." Every saint still hears Christ say that, in his own consciousness, as he looks forward to the full glory of the resurrection of his body in a time yet to come. So he sings: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell ..."

The whole of the Christian life is there. The birth of the believer in God's providence; his salvation in Christ; his walk in God's creation; his battle with sin; his constant need of grace; his longing to enjoy God's gift of sleep when he is on his bed; his fears and terrors, struggles and sorrows, joys and hopes—in relation to God, to his fellow saints, to the world about him, to his family, to death, to the resurrection, to the world to come, yes, fundamentally and principally, to Christ.

The Psalms are his traveling companion in his pilgrim's sojourn, his road map, his torch to find his way, his comfort and inspiration, his song book when talking to God, and always everything he wants to say to God, to the world about him, and to those with whom he lives in the company of the redeemed.

It must be that that is why my wife and I, when venturing out in our songs together into the realm of hymns, always find ourselves returning to the Psalms. And that is why we, and all who understand the Psalms, want to sing the Psalms in church on the Lord's Day.

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