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The Temple Singers

1 Chronicles 23:5, 30; 25:1-7

The service of singing

When king David had grown old, he gave instructions to his son Solomon to build the temple and to divide the Levites and to assign them their duties. David is a type of Christ the Lord, as having authority to determine the order in God's house, which is the Church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15). So He acts as the Son and Lord over His own house (Heb. 3:6), and He tells us how we ought to conduct ourselves in His holy temple. He does this by His Word and by the Spirit, and the order within the Church bears every mark of it. It is not an order devised by men, but the order of the Spirit in conformity with the instructions of the Word of God (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).

This also holds true for the work of the 'singers', who are still present today. For Christ Himself is the 'Chief Musician' of His people, and He sings praises to His God and Father in the midst of the congregation (Ps. 22:23; Heb. 2:12). After His resurrection from the dead, God put a new song in His mouth: it is the song of triumph over death and of salvation from Satan's power. This song has resounded in our hearts, and as the redeemed of the Lord we join in it with our risen Lord (Ps. 40:3). This new song really is an eternal song of praise to the honour and glory of the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:9).

As Christians we shall always remember Him in His death on Calvary's cross. Similarly, the work of the temple singers was, to a certain extent, a permanent duty that was associated with the sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering. The

service of singing in the house of the Lord is not mentioned in connection with the tabernacle service. It appears to be a *new* institution introduced by David, 'the sweet psalmist of Israel' (2 Sam. 23:1). The tabernacle was God's house during the wilderness journey, and that journey certainly did not inspire singing. As far as we know, the people of Israel only sang twice in the wilderness: right at the beginning and almost at the end of their wanderings from Egypt to Canaan. We find the song of Moses after the Red Sea crossing (Ex. 15), and the song of praise in connection with the wells through which God strengthened His people when they had reached the border of Moab (Num. 21). Israel also danced around the golden calf and sang there, but that song was a disgrace to God.

The time of singing

So it was not in the wilderness, but only in the Promised Land that the time of singing had come, to use the words of the Song of Solomon (Song 2:12). This did not happen immediately after Israel's entry into Canaan, but centuries later in the days of David and Solomon. Then a time of peace and quietness had come that was needed for the establishment of a permanent sanctuary for the Lord and a regular worship to the honour of His name. The appointment of the singers, for that matter, was associated with finding a final resting place for the Ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence. When it was no longer needed to lead the people in battle against the enemies, it found a resting place in the City of David and later in Solomon's temple.

So the rest of the kingdom of peace was a requirement for the temple service and the work of the temple singers (1 Chron. 6:31-32; 19:19-17; 22:6-19; 28:2ff; 2 Chron. 6:41-42; Ps. 132). A 'time of rest', a 'man of rest' and a 'house of rest' were all needed for the introduction of a regular worship and a permanent song of praise to God's glory. The ministry of the Levitical singers was based on this situation of peace and quietness in the land of Israel. God's good hand was over His people, and He looked with favour on them. The Ark of His presence had found its resting place on Mount Zion. God dwelled in the midst of His people. And the king after His own heart reigned by the grace of God. For these reasons the Levites could continually sing, 'His mercy endures for ever'. This chorus was first heard when David brought the Ark to its resting place in Jerusalem, and it was sung again when the Ark was brought into Solomon's temple (1 Chron. 16:34, 41; 2 Chron. 5:13).

The endless song

Obviously, this has great significance for us too. In the same way as God's mercies for Israel were sure in the person of the anointed king, we are sure of His grace in the One whom He anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. Our blessed Lord Jesus, the Christ of God, is our perfect Representative and Head. God has exalted Him to be Lord of all. Through Him we are the objects of God's favour. Through Him we have peace with God, and through Him we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand (Rom. 5:1-2). Through Him, we have been delivered from the power of darkness and have been translated into the Kingdom of the Son of His love, the Man after His own heart (Col. 1:13). This is a kingdom of light and love, and also a kingdom of 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17).

Shouldn't we then, as well, break into a song of praise and thank Him for His endless mercy, His eternal goodness? For us too, the time of rest and of singing has come. We know this Prince of Peace, who has found a resting place in the midst of His people. So we can be thankful and happy. The song that God's mercy endures for ever, is an endless song that resounds in our midst to the glory and honour of the Father and the Son. This song of praise will resound in the Church throughout all ages, world without end. So we can conclude that now too, the 'choirs' are lined up in God's temple to sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 2:17-22; 5:19).

In Colossians 3:16, our songs of praise are clearly connected with mutual instruction, teaching and admonition. For we read here: '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 (that is, conscious of grace, 'for His mercy endures for ever') in your hearts to the Lord'. Therefore the singing also contains a *prophetic* element: it contains something that is to the edification of others. Not only is God honoured by it, but our fellow believers are also edified in the faith. It is very interesting to note that it is said of the temple singers in 1 Chronicles 29, that they *prophesied* (vv. 1-5). They sang and at the same time they prophesied. Their songs of praise were meant to glorify God, and also to instruct His people.

The hour of revival

I would like to close with a few words on the position of the Levitical singers in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, that is the same time in which the author of the Chronicles lived and in which he remembered the former glory under David and Solomon. A remnant had returned to the Promised Land, to the place where the Lord had caused His name to dwell. By the rivers of Babylon, the singers had hung their harps upon the willows. How could they possibly sing one of the songs of Zion, the Lord's song, in a foreign land? How could they sing there about Zion, about the mountain of God's grace, about the sanctuary of the one true God and the reign of His king (Ps. 137)?

But as soon as they returned to Jerusalem, they resumed their duties. It was a day of revival, of restoration, and of rebuilding respectively of the altar, the temple, and the city wall. When the foundation of the new temple had been laid, we hear the singers sing again. Once again, they sang the chorus that God's mercy endures for ever (Ezra 3:10-11). The choirs also had a very significant role in celebrating the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:27ff.). Everything took place according to the command of David and Solomon his son, 'for in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God' (Neh. 12:45-46).

And so, we too, in a time of decay and decline, should return to the institutions God has delivered to His Church from the very beginning through the risen Lord and His apostles. At the restoration of true worship around the Christian altar, that is the Lord's table, the 'singers', the worshippers should also be set in their place to sing the endless song of praise to God in His holy temple.

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