

## **20251026 Dangerous Singing and Singing Dangerously – Dr John Tan**

We look at two particular aspects of singing in worship this morning – Dangerous Singing and Singing Dangerously. What is the difference between these two perspectives?

Worship involves singing but singing alone is not necessarily worship.

The purpose of all creation is to worship the true and living God in a manner that is acceptable to Him. And that manner is that the Lord wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

<sup>21</sup> “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

We will concentrate on the words ‘we worship what we do know’ and ‘worshipping in the Spirit and in truth’.

It is hard to think of worship without thinking of singing and music. Singing is such an integral part of worship, and we are commanded to make a joyful noise unto the Lord (Psalm 100).

The first thing to note is that God-honoring worship is not merely a formal ascription of praise to God; God honoring worship must emerge from our whole being to this great almighty God, and therefore it reflects not only our understanding of God but of our love for Him. Worship is no longer defined by location, but it is defined by the object of one’s affection. True worship is done “in spirit and truth” as one contemplates the glory of God. It must be God-centered and Christ-centered.

As I mentioned earlier, there are a number of reasons as to why we sing – for instance, we sing to worship the Lord, we sing to build the church (1 Corinthians 14:26 says when you assemble, one has a psalm (or hymn), has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. All things are to be done for edification (which is the moral or intellectual instruction or improvement of someone). We sing to comfort and strengthen ourselves during trials (James 5:13) and to remind ourselves of His deliverance

(Acts 16:25). We sing in gratitude to the Lord. We sing with the mind and in the spirit and we sing to prepare ourselves for the greatest, most magnificent eternal choir when we get to heaven.

There are far too many aspects for us to cover everything and today what we will do is to look at just two of these areas. The first is about the unfortunate aspects of modern worship – what I have called Dangerous Singing and the second has to do with worshipping during trials, which I have given the title of Singing Dangerously.

## **Dangerous Singing: Unfortunate aspects of modern-day worship:**

There are elements in modern-day music that needs to be held to the light so that we can see whether or not the worship that we are engaging in when we sing these songs is God- and Christ-centered.

Unfortunate corruptions of worship in modern day music include the following:

- Self-centered songs. These are not what some might call ‘me-centric’ e.g., Lord, I need you. Songs like that may seem to focus on the ‘I’ but they are actually saying Lord I need You. But there are self-centered songs that are passed off as worship songs. These songs tend to have a focus on emotions, on comfort, where theological truths are minimized and tend to be repetitive with excessive emotionalism. Many tend to be entertainment centric as well – relying on upbeat tempos, energy and repeated lines.
- Then there is the problem of songs being theologically questionable (or their composers are theologically questionable). This is also present in the messages that are often self-centered. In preaching the prosperity gospel, some preachers tell people that if they accept the Lord they will have peace, health and prosperity, that if we give the Lord a \$100, that we will get back \$200, that the Savior, the Healer and the King is coming for **me, and ME** is the center of our message and our worship. In some ways this is reflected in some of the songs that we sing when we engage these self-centered songs.

- There are songs that sound like chants which have lines which are repeated *ad infinitum* and *ad nauseum*. Repetitions have been used to try and create focus and increased emotion but often is really a reflection of the lack of depth in song writing. For instance, why do we need to sing ‘break every chain’ and repeat these words so many times? There is also the rather common practice these days to repeat the repetition. Recall Juan Carlos Ortiz’s experience.

One of the problems with many modern-day worship songs is their shallowness, in theology, and in the way that it makes us think about God. Contemporary worship songs and those that center around ‘us’ rather than focus on the Lord do not help to give us a theological grounding that will enable us to stand, and to stand firm when trials come our way.

Why is this so important though, why is it important that we know how we are worshipping? I believe that the Lord wants us to sing with the spirit but also to sing with the mind so that we can really understand how great the Lord is. This allows us to develop the correct understanding of just what a great God it is that we serve and worship. This takes us to the next point which is the matter of being able to Sing Dangerously.

## **Singing Dangerously: Singing in trials**

- Singing to tell of His deliverance (Acts 16:25)
- “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them”

There are songs that really help us understand the delivering power of the Lord. We can see an example of this in Acts 16:16 – 34. Paul and Silas had just deprived some people of their little cash machine – the fortune telling girl. She was delivered when the demon inside of her was cast out. For doing this, Paul and Silas were dragged and thrown into prison. They were stripped and beaten with rods and then kept in a dungeon. But instead of resting and sleeping, around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to the Lord. Have you ever wondered what they were singing about? Was their singing was so bad that it triggered an earthquake, or it was so powerful that it moved the hand of God

to bring about a violent earthquake had the ability to throw off the prisoners' chains. Their worship of the Lord brought about their deliverance.

Frank Fortunato wrote a book called '*Singing Dangerously: How Christians endure persecution through song*'. Christians have and will continue to suffer from persecution throughout our lives. Sometimes the persecution comes in extreme forms and the believer's very life is threatened; sometimes the persecution is rather mild and more of an annoyance than anything else. But persecution will come – and we must make sure that our worship helps us to stand firm in the Lord when these trials come our way.

Let me give you some examples of singing in trials from the book '*Singing Dangerously*'.

- A mighty fortress is our God
- Dmitri
- Churches in Nigeria and North Korea

### **So where does this all lead us to?**

Singing in preparation for eternal worship

I end by sharing with you a worship session that I shall not forget. This happened many years ago, when I was still in Malaysia. The church had a retreat and about 400 people were together in a beach resort. That night, there was no preaching of the word. The congregation sang and worshipped from 7 pm to just after 1 am in the morning – this was over six hours of praising of worshipping and of declaring the greatness of the Lord. This would be something to remember for life as it was preparations for a time when we will be engaged in eternal and endless worship of the one true God.

So then, 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 (Colossians 3:16)