

Name that Tune: The Song of a Grateful Heart

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Psalm 33, John 1:1-5, 14-18

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1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") **16** Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and^[b] is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Psalm 33 NIV

1 Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.

2 Praise the LORD with the harp;
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.

3 Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully, and shout for joy.

4 For the **word** of the LORD is right and true;
he is faithful in all he does.

5 The LORD loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is **full** of his unfailing love.

6 By the **word** of the LORD the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

7 He gathers the waters of the sea into jars;
he puts the deep into storehouses.

8 Let **all** the earth fear the LORD;
let **all** the people of the world revere him.

9 **For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.**

10 The LORD foils the plans of the nations;
he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.

11 But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through **all** generations.

¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people he chose for his inheritance.
¹³ From heaven the LORD looks down
and sees **all** mankind;
¹⁴ from his dwelling place he watches
all who live on earth—
¹⁵ he who forms the hearts of **all**,
who considers everything they do.
¹⁶ No king is saved by the size of his army;
no warrior escapes by his great strength.
¹⁷ A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
despite **all** its great strength it cannot save.
¹⁸ But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
¹⁹ to deliver them from death
and keep them alive in famine.
²⁰ We wait in hope for the LORD;
he is our help and our shield.
²¹ In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.
²² May your unfailing love be with us, LORD,
even as we put our hope in you.

Music is powerful. We know this intuitively.

Hans Christian Andersen said: "When words fail, music speaks."

Music – like the psalms themselves –speaks to the wide range of human emotion.

Just as we have favorite psalms and hymns, we have favorite songs. Sometimes, whether it is a favorite or not, a song gets stuck in our heads, a so called "ear worm"! This phenomena is so common, scientists have studied it. Ninety percent of us experience this at least once a week. A song gets stuck in our minds on replay and it seems as if there is nothing we can do to get rid of it.

One reason music is so extraordinarily powerful is because it activates not one or two areas of the brain, but a minimum of four areas, depending upon whether one is just listening, singing along, or playing the music on an instrument.

For instance, listening involves the auditory cortex, singing words involves the left temporal lobe, rhythm involves the cerebellum, and the tune itself

activates the right parietal lobe of the brain. Then if you add movement, additional areas of the brain are involved. Music is good for our brains!

In one study, patients prior to surgery were given either a drug or music to listen to. Those who listened to music had less anxiety and less stress (as determined by measurement of the stress hormone cortisol).

Now—as to how to get rid of that pesky earworm/song? Researchers suggest listening to the entire song all the way to the end, as sometimes the brain simply wants closure. Or, British researchers found that listening to or singing “God Save the Queen” did the trick!

Psalm 33 begins with an invitation to celebrate and worship Yahweh/Jehovah God. In v. 1-3, a series of five **imperatives** summon the people of God to praise:

rejoice, praise, make melody, sing, play.

An imperative is a command. If we are obedient, we must respond whether we feel like it or not. At the very least we are to worship God in each of these five ways.

Jennifer Breeding tells about an occasion when her two young daughters were visiting her parents. While sitting at the breakfast table, the doorbell rang. Grandpa went to the door and returned a short time later.

The older girl asked: “Who was that, Grandpa?”

He told her he was an appraiser.

The younger girl asked: “What’s an appraiser?”

Before Grandpa could explain, her older sister replied: “Oh you know, He’s someone who goes to church every Sunday. *He’s a praiser.*” (J. Breeding, Christian Reader, “Lite Fare”.)

Of course! It makes perfect sense! Are you a praiser??

If there are *more than* these five ways to express praise to God, then go for it! Shakespeare asked: “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways”. How might we worship our God? Let us not be limited to these five ways, but discover endless ways to do so! *That is why we are encouraged to sing a NEW song...not because the old one is worn out, but because God’s mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:3-5)! We have something NEW to sing about as we experience God afresh, each and every new day!*

In the next section (v. 4-11) the focus of the psalmist is **our motivation** to praise and rejoice.

Why should we do so? What is our motivation to worship and rejoicing?

First, we are motivated to worship God, because of WHO God is!

In the ancient middle east there were numerous other religions whose gods were capricious, competitive, and unreliable. In contrast to these, the God of Israel is one who is [yasar] “right”, and

[`emunah] “faithful”=reliable, steadfast, honest in everything. Because Yahweh is upright and reliable, he also loves righteousness and justice in the world he created, and in his relationships with all creation. These relationships are characterized by [hesed] “unfailing love” or “faithful care”.

Yahweh/God is worthy of our worship!

Secondly, we are motivated to worship God, because of the power of God’s creative Word! (v.6-9)

A new song is sung in response to a new world that is oriented in a new way.

The psalmist recalls the creation of Genesis in which God speaks a word and the world as we know it comes into being—Genesis 1 creates a litany: “And God said...and it was so.” Likewise it brings to mind the beginning of John’s Gospel which was read for us: Jesus himself is the most eloquent and comprehensive “word”/“speech”/communique to the inhabitants of the world!

From the starry heavens to the vastness of the seas, all of creation speaks of the Creator’s power, glory and majesty. Given the world in which the Psalmist lived, the lack of air pollution and electric lights, no doubt it was commonplace to see the Milky Way on any cloudless night. But the sea? That is another thing altogether. While the author of this psalm likely had seen the Mediterranean, chances are that the Psalmist had no idea that two thirds of the earth’s surfaces is covered by oceans!

I read a fascinating article that **linked music and creation**. Research in the field of bioacoustics has revealed that we are surrounded by millions of ultrasonic “songs” being emitted by God’s creation. For instance: the electron shell of the carbon atom produces the same harmonic scale as a Gregorian chant. Whale songs travel thousands of miles underwater. Meadowlarks have a range of three hundred notes!

All of creation is singing God’s praises, whether we can hear it or not!

Lacking the scientific understandings that we possess, the author still expresses a belief in the amazing creative power of God’s word to create!

Centuries later the Apostle Paul will argue that even if God had not sent his Son Jesus into the world, **people could not claim ignorance of who God is, because God is “plainly” revealed in Creation itself.** ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so [that] people are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)

Psalms 33:6 and 9 act like “bookends” regarding the powerful speech of God which evokes, in the Psalmist and in us, both respect/reverence and fear or awe.

Thirdly, we are motivated to worship God, in light of God’s enduring wisdom and God’s unshakeable plan and purpose.

¹⁰ The LORD foils the plans of the nations;
he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.

¹¹ But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through **all** generations.

A few verses later we read:

¹⁶ No king is saved by the size of his army;
no warrior escapes by his **great** strength.

¹⁷ A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
despite **all** its **great** strength it cannot save.

Now, I don’t know what keeps you awake at night, but sometimes I have to forego the 11 p.m. news broadcast. I have nightmares. If Kim Jong Un has no apparent scruples about arranging the assassination of his own family members, he can say whatever he wants to our President, Secretary of State, (or any world leader, for that matter) and personally, I would not trust him. Not on what he says he had for breakfast this morning or whether or not he will eliminate one/some/or all of North Korea’s nuclear weapons! That’s one thing I lose sleep over. That is the tip of the iceberg, not to mention the Middle East, etc.

But the Psalmist’s point is this: God’s plan and purpose in and through history is just that—His Story. God’s Story! In his sovereignty and providence, God will not allow God’s plans to be thwarted by well-intentioned or ill-intentioned world leaders or terrorists, bullies big or small, or anyone else!

God will stay the course and yes, even use the ill-intentioned actions of some—for instance, those who crucified Jesus—to accomplish God’s eternal purpose!

We are cautioned **not** to put our trust in the size of a nation's nuclear arsenal—or in the size or strength of armies/navies/troops of any kind—or anything else! Rather, **we are encouraged to put our complete trust in the Creator/Sovereign/Steadfastly Loving God of Israel.**

Why? Because of God's "all-ness":

All knowing/discerning, seeing, powerful/prevailing-ness! (v 13-15)

¹³ From heaven the LORD looks down
and sees **all** mankind;

¹⁴ from his dwelling place he watches
all who live on earth—

¹⁵ he who forms the hearts of **all**,
who considers everything they do.

¹⁸ But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love....

Because of this divine scrutiny, there is no escape. **Yahweh sees all**—even **penetrating the inward thoughts of the hearts** of his creatures. Thus the plans and purposes of humans are transparent to God, as is our willingness or lack of willingness to trust in him.

The Good News is evident even here, in the OT—the psalmist finds comfort in the knowledge that the Creator is still connected to and concerned for ALL creation, including ALL of humanity. And, most especially, our hearts!

The psalm concludes with a communal affirmation of trust in Yahweh. *Hope and help is found in Yahweh!*

Waiting in hope is not an easy place to be, but it is where the author leads us. This hopeful waiting is **in contrast to panicked action.**

Have you ever been there?? "Don't just stand there, DO something!"

Perhaps the Psalmist would reply to this:
Don't DO anything, just stand there...TRUST that **God** will act.
Trusting God **is** doing something!

God's timing is perfect. We are impatient and imperfect.
Yahweh will act—according to God's character—God will act rightly,
creatively, powerfully, justly, and lovingly. And in a timely way.
Why?

Because that is who God is.

Because that is what God does.

The Psalmist invites us to be "praisers"-- to sing a new song in praise to this God!

So don't just sit there...Let's sing!!!