

EPHESIANS #85 5:19 10-26-14

SPIRIT SONG

(Ephesians 5) Yes, we are back in Ephesians. It is time for us to plant our hearts and minds for a while in the epistle of the apostle to the church at Ephesus. When we left off we had finished covering verse 18 which exhorts us to be filled with the Spirit of God. But the results of that filling are described for another 23 verses, beginning with verse 19. As we move to our study in God's word for today follow as I read **18-20** *do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.* Although our text for today is verse 19 the main thought of the passage is in verse 18 where it says to be filled with the Spirit. That is the imperative verb. The singing referred to is not given as a command, so much as a result of the filling. The point is that where the fullness of the Spirit is found, there too you will find believers who love to sing. At General Assembly one year one of the speakers handed out a sheet listing around twenty signs of spiritual declension and one of those was the absence of a song in the heart. If being spiritually full is expressed by singing then it seems we can conclude that a failure to sing, the absence of that desire, is an expression of what? Of spiritual emptiness. That is what I want us to think about today. The relationship of singing and the Spirit. Parade magazine reports that in 1873 William Linkhaw was convicted of a misdemeanor for singing in church. Linkhaw was a Methodist who, it seems, would keep singing when the rest of the church had stopped. Linkhaw refused to be silent, arguing that singing was part of his duty to God. But the court found him guilty and ordered him to hold his peace. Fascinating huh? Here is a man convicted over his singing in church. Maybe today, as the Spirit wills, some of us will be convicted over not singing in church.

We have five major headings this morning. Numero uno, is the power of singing. ② One of the most influential forces in the world is music, especially the music that is joined to words. I remember talking to a man years back who worked with juvenile criminals and he said that one of the shared traits of young criminals was a devotion to heavy-metal rock music. Nowadays it may be hip-hop. In an interview I heard with two kids convicted of a satanic ritual murder, the thing they pointed to as leading them into that lifestyle was that same kind of music. What station you tune your radio to, what kind of music you choose to fill your mind with, is not a matter of indifference.

You will be shaped by the songs that fill your ears. Aristotle said, “*Music represents the passions of the soul...if one listens to the wrong kind of music he will become the wrong kind of person.*” And to a great extent the reverse is true. God has created us as musical beings. I don’t understand it but I know that music touches a nerve deep in my soul and yours as well. Therefore, we do well to work hard as gatekeepers, allowing into our spirit thru music, only that which is pure and right and good. Consider what you are doing to yourself and your children by the kind of music you surround yourself with. The singing you hear and the singing you do is powerful.

Secondly, I want us to see that singing is a distinctive trait of the people of God. I have often said that Christianity is a singing religion, but that was just as true of Old Testament Hebrew faith. Way back in Exodus, after God rescued His people from the Egyptians and the sea how did they respond? Moses and Miriam and their backup vocalists sang this song to the Lord, “I will sing unto the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously.” In Judges 5 Deborah and Barak sang a duet of praise as well. In I Chronicles 16 we read of how David instituted a Tabernacle choir, not the Mormon tabernacle choir, but the original tabernacle choir. When the temple was dedicated it was given to the Lord in a cloud of awesome musical praise. Of the 38,000 Levites who were appointed to oversee the house of the Lord - (38,000 - that’s quite a church staff isn’t it?), 4,000 were musicians and singers. And God gave them their own special hymnbook didn’t He? We now call it the book of Psalms. It was the original hymnbook and of all the things the psalms tell us to do, the most frequently mentioned is to praise the Lord with singing. Nothing changes when we get to the New Testament. We read of Jesus singing a hymn with his men after the Last Supper. In the book of Acts we read about a singing church. The New Testament has several examples of New Testament hymnody. When Paul and Silas are thrown in jail in Philippi what do we find them doing? They sang in prison. I Corinthians 14:15 tells us to sing with the spirit and with understanding. And whenever we open to the last chapter of the book, when we get a glimpse into the activities of eternity what do we find going on? Singing. Revelation 5:9 says the congregation of the redeemed will sing a new song. Revelation 14 says it too 14:3 *they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.* Revelation 15 says 15:2 *I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. We will be instantly talented.* 15:3 *And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty;*

Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! The occupation of heaven is going to be what? Singing. The only ministry of the church that will remain is the choir and we will all be in it. And if there were such a thing as purgatory the only purpose in it that I could see is to give singing lessons to those who didn't learn here. The people of God are a singing people - always have been and always will be.

Our third major heading today is the times to sing ®. When should you sing? Not all the time. This, I suppose was William Linkhaw's problem. He sang at the wrong time. But the Scripture says that almost all the time is a good time. It says we should sing when we are happy. That is what Moses did and Miriam did and Deborah and Barak did. One summer Beth and I stayed in a private home in Colorado Springs which included a 17 year old young lady named Tiffany. One day Tiffany came home in the afternoon, went up to her room and I could hear her singing a tune I was pretty familiar with. It goes like this: "New York, New York, I want to wake up in a city, that never sleeps..." I found out later that Tiffany had gotten an offer to attend a prestigious music camp in New York the next week and she was singing because she was happy. This is what God says we ought to do when we are happy, but He directs our selection of songs. He says James 5:**13cd** *Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.* But that isn't the only time to sing. Sad times are also appropriate. We even have a genre of music that we call *the blues* don't we? There is something soothing about singing when you are blue. Singing is one of the best ways I know to handle depression. You know the story of Paul and Silas in prison don't you? They had been severely beaten, and were sitting in a dark jail in a strange town and yet they sang hymns of praise to God. And you know what happened? God sent an earthquake, because God responds when His people praise Him, especially in such a time as that. Hard times are good times for singing. And finally, we should just suggest that all times are good for singing. Psalm one says that we should meditate on the word of God day and night. Philippians 4:8 says we should think on what is true, and honorable and right and pure and good. And singing is one of the best ways I know to do that.

Our fourth heading looks at what types of songs ought we to sing. There are all types of songs aren't there? Love songs, fight songs, songs that tells stories. But the Holy Spirit doesn't plant within us just any old song. He isn't the musical Spirit, but the Holy Spirit and the kind of songs He gives us are described in our text as psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. We can't be real precise in distinguishing these, but I would suggest you think of psalms as being psalms - the Old Testament poetry. Many of our songs are taken right from the divinely inspired book. Hymns would be other songs directed specifically in praise to God. Spiritual songs may be songs that are

reminders of Biblical truth. All of these have a place in the Christian's repertoire. You see that we don't have to sing the same kind of songs all the time. Amazingly, there are some believers, few in number now, who insist that only psalms are to be sung in worship. Most of these live in Pittsburgh and they are terrific brothers and sisters. But, theirs is a view I cannot go along with since the songs of the New Testament, especially the book of Revelation, are not taken from the Psalms. As New Testament believers there is much to celebrate that was not revealed when David wrote. It is right and good for us to sing a new song to the Lamb.

On now to our fifth and final heading for the day. Let's look at the benefits of singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. One story comes to mind from the life of Ira Sankey. Sankey was one of the great hymn writers and church musicians of the 19th century. He worked along side D.L. Moody in many great revivals. On Christmas eve 1875 he was travelling the Delaware River on steamboat when he was recognized by some passengers and asked to sing for them. He sang William Bradbury's hymn, "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us." One of the stanzas begins, *We are Thine; do Thou befriend us. Be the Guardian of our way.* When he finished, a man stepped from the shadows and asked, *Did you ever serve in the Union army? Yes, Mr. Sankey answered, in the Spring of 1860. So did I, but I was serving in the Confederate army. When I saw you standing at your post, I thought to myself, "That fellow will never get away alive." I raised my musket and took aim. I was standing in the shadow completely concealed, while the full light of the moon was falling upon you. At that instant, just as a moment ago, you raised your eyes to heaven and began to sing. "Let him sing his song to the end," I said to myself, "I can shoot him afterwards. He's my victim at all events, and my bullet cannot miss him." But the song you sang then was the song you sang just now. I heard the words perfectly, "We are Thine; do Thou befriend us. Be the Guardian of our way." Those words stirred up many memories. I began to think of my childhood and my God-fearing mother. She had many times sung that song to me. When you had finished your song, it was impossible for me to take aim again. I thought, "The Lord who is able to save that man from certain death must surely be great and mighty." And my arm of its own accord dropped limp at my side.* So, I guess our first benefit of singing is that it can save your life. At least it has that potential. But there are still four more normal benefits of singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

#1 is that singing serves to impress truth upon one's mind. @ "Oh, sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip..." I haven't seen that show in twenty years at least but I can sing the song. Music makes things memorable. How did you learn the alphabet? ABCDEFG... and it seems we can make good use of that if we put to music truths of Scripture that we want to impress

upon our minds. Psalm one says that we are blessed when the word of God is our meditation day and night, and the easiest way I know of to make that your testimony is to learn lots of Scripture songs. How much is there that we can learn if we become Spirit-filled people who often sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs?

The second benefit of singing is to impress truths on the heart. There is a difference between knowing something in your head and feeling it in your heart; and music is often the bridge between the two. When truth is put to music it takes on an emotional quality that has greater power to penetrate into the depths of our being. This is the whole reason why we sing poetry instead of just quoting it. I could stand here and tell you that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever and the government will rest on His shoulders. That's great, but when a large choir sings that we more readily grasp the wonder of it all. And for my taste, there is nothing so tremendous as congregational singing done with excellence and with heart and with enthusiasm. Spurgeon recounts the time that 12,000 gathered to hear him preach and he wrote, *I think I shall never forget the impression I received when, before we separated, that vast multitude joined in singing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." That night, I could understand better than ever before why the apostle John in the Revelation, compared the "new song" in heaven to "the voice of many waters." In that glorious hallelujah, the mighty waves of praise seemed to roll up toward the sky, in majestic grandeur even as billow of old ocean break upon the beach.* (The Forgotten Spurgeon p.92)- Some of you have experienced this in a great way at large Christian events such as Promise Keepers. In the mid-90s, when I stood with 40,000 pastors in Atlanta to praise the Lord I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. Such singing has a power to touch the heart. We do well to use this power wisely, filling our hearts with the truth of God in singing.

The third benefit of singing is to exhort others ® in the way of righteousness. We usually think of singing as being "unto God" but that is often not the case. The songs we use in worship are sometimes priestly, meaning that they are addressed to God, and they are sometimes prophetic, meaning that they are addressed to men. When we sing, "Onward Christian Soldiers" who are we talking to? And our text for today says that we should be speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Colossians 3:**16ab** *Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.* This is what we do when we sing, "Rejoice in the Lord Always." "Seek Ye First." "Trust and

Obey.” There is music with a message and the Spirit-filled man will make his music a means of grace and truth.

The fourth benefit of singing is to express praise to God. ®. In both the Colossians text and our text in Ephesians Paul goes on to say that with our songs and with our hearts we sing to the Lord a song of thanksgiving. I hope you know that the key to worship is found in the heart. We worship in spirit, not in song. The song is only good to the extent that it expresses the heart of the singer. You can have Carrie Underwood singing *How Great Thou Art* accompanied by the New York Philharmonic and there be no worship going on. I think it is fair to say that what God hears anyway is not the sounds that come from our lips but the thoughts and affections of our hearts. These find their expression in musical worship. And the man or woman full of the Holy Spirit longs to pour forth adoration Godward. We find our souls groping for ways to tell God how wonderful He is and how grateful we are. There is no more common way than singing. The singing praises to God has the marvelous effect of centering our thoughts on the Lord and on His power and love. That is so helpful in times of anxiety. As I worked on this last week, I was facing some of the most difficult leadership challenges of my life. I was so burdened by it all, I felt I weighed 800 lbs. The stress was suffocating me until I put on some worship music and fell down before the Lord. On my knees and then on my face, I could see how much bigger He is than my problems. I remember my first nerve-racking sermon forty years ago. Right before I was to preach we sang, “He Leadeth Me O Blessed Thought, O words with heavenly comfort fraught, whate’er I do, where’er I be still tis God’s hand that leadeth me.” When I remembered who God is, by that song, I was calmed. We need so very much to praise and the fullness of the Spirit produces that habit. By our singing we express praise to the Lord.

There are your benefits of singing. God commands us to sing. Over and again in the psalms we are exhorted to sing to the Lord. You don’t have to have a great voice, only a willing spirit. If you are a non-singer here today I want to encourage you about this part of our calling. You won’t wind up in civil court for not singing, but you will answer to God one day for your failure to exercise your vocal apparatus in praise to His name. And remember that the real issue here is not about filling our lives with song but about filling our lives with the Spirit. That’s the application. One of our hymns says, “I have a song that Jesus gave me.” It says, “In my heart ® there rings a melody.” Can you say that? Does the song of Christ Jesus ring in your heart? It’s been a few years since I first told you the story about Chippie. Remember Chippie? I think his story is fitting for our subject today. It seems there was a bird named Chippie who lived in a cage, owned by a woman who one

day was too busy to change the papers in Chippies cage, so she tried to clean the bird cage with the vacuum cleaner. As she was vacuuming the cage her phone rang. She turned to answer it when she heard the noise, “WHOOSH.” She turned back to the cage and, you guessed it, no more Chippie. The bird was now in the bag. Quickly she hung up the phone, opened the bag and found Chippie - still alive but filthy. She went to the bathroom, turned up the water full force and stuck Chippie beneath it. Soon he was clean but wet, so she pulled out the hair dryer and within minutes Chippie was dry, warm and back in his cage. Everything seemed to be fine, but it wasn't. Days later someone asked, “How's Chippie?” The answer came back, “Well, he seems OK, except that he doesn't sing anymore. He just sits and stares out into the room.” Does that story describe you, or someone you love? What is it that has robbed you of your song? That has sucked away all the joy and the life? I promise you, it is nothing beyond the power of God. When He fills with His Spirit He can turn your mourning into dancing again. He can dry your tears and put a smile on your face and wind in your sails. Seek Him. Not the song so much, but the spiritual health, the fullness that springs forth in singing that will have no end. Let's pray.