

Be Thankful

Matthew Henry, author of a widely-respected 19th century commentary on the whole Bible, was once robbed. In his diary that evening he wrote the following words: *"Let me be thankful: First, because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because even though they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."*

Doesn't that remind you of the beautiful song, Count Your Many Blessings? Think of the words: "Count your many blessings, name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done." God has been so good to each one of us. We have received blessings we certainly have not deserved. Let us be ever thankful, and express our thanksgiving to God constantly in prayer.

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A Dog's Nose!

A friend of mine in the Navy had an uncle who did a good bit of lumber-jacking in the Northwest early in the 20th century. The biggest and worst surprise he ever got was in an Indian camp. The policy of the logging companies in those days was to stay on as good terms as they could for the sake of peace as well as prosperity. A nearby Indian tribe had invited them all for a meal, and my friend's uncle said the main dish, some sort of stew in a huge cauldron, really was not that bad. It was a different sort of taste, but it was all right. As a matter of fact it was good enough that he decided he wanted another bowl of the stuff. He got the dipper and stirred around in that big pot and dished himself up a 'mess'. Apparently, he dug a bit deep. Out of the depths of that pot he dished up - - - I suspect I had better just go ahead and say it - - - A DOG'S NOSE!! It's truly amazing how a fellow's appetite can disappear as he comes face to face (or nose to nose!) with the main ingredient!

In the denominational man-made religious world of today there is something that tastes good. It may be the sincerity of its followers, although this is not enough in itself (Acts 26:9). It may be the beautiful buildings which please the eye, although Jesus points us to other things (John 4:20-24). It may be doctrines of easy acceptance, and simple belief, and no possibility of falling from grace, although Jesus demanded strict adherence and faithfulness to His ways, not ours (Revelation 2:10). It may be the appeal of the social gospel rather than basic concern for souls. It may be smooth and eloquent preachers able to paint beautiful word pictures instead of God's simple truths. But behind everyone of these things lies the old dog's nose: it is the tradition of men that makes for vain and unacceptable worship (Matthew 15:9).

Men need to dip deep into their beliefs to see if it is God's truth or if it is the dog's nose. It may make you sick at your stomach, but you will at least know what you are eating. And it may just make you change your diet. "Prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

- by Robert Hines

The Music of the Early Church

Many people assume that the use of mechanical instruments in worship has always been a part of Christianity. After all, instruments are common in much of the religious world today. But when we examine the historical record, we learn that this was not the practice of the early church. In fact, respected historians and scholars widely acknowledge that the earliest Christians worshipped with vocal music only. For example:

- Music historian Edward Dickinson, in his work *Music in the History of the Western Church*, explains that the music of the early church was exclusively vocal and that instruments were generally not used in worship, in part because of their associations with pagan practices.
- Church historian Everett Ferguson, in *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, documents that both the New Testament and the writings of early Christian authors point to vocal music alone being used in Christian worship for several centuries.

- Historian W. D. Killen, in *The Ancient Church*, describes early congregational worship as involving the whole assembly joining together in song, without the accompaniment of mechanical instruments.
- Music scholar Frank Landon Humphreys, in *Evolution of Church Music*, likewise concludes that the music used in the earliest Christian services was entirely vocal.

These observations are not coming from individuals trying to defend a particular doctrinal position. Rather, they are the conclusions of historians who have carefully studied the worship practices of early Christianity. Their findings consistently point in the same direction: instrumental music was not a part of the worship of the early church.

The reason becomes even clearer when we open the New Testament itself. Every passage that instructs Christians about music in worship speaks about singing:

- Ephesians 5:19 — “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”
- Colossians 3:16 — “Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”
- Hebrews 13:15 — “Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.”
- James 5:13 — “Is any merry? let him sing psalms.”

Notice the emphasis. Christians were instructed to sing. The melody was to come from the heart, and the praise was described as the fruit of our lips.

When congregations today lift their voices together in simple, heartfelt singing, they are doing exactly what the earliest Christians did. More importantly, they are following the pattern and authority given by the Lord in His word.

- by Greg Gwin