

Knowing the Music
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Colossians 3:12-17
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- I. During her second year of teaching, our daughter, Ellen, was playing accompaniment for a program being presented by another elementary music teacher.
- A. One of the students was singing a solo, but he forgot the words to the third verse.
1. Going blank as Ellen's accompaniment drew near where he was supposed to open his mouth and sing, he did the only logical thing—he ran off stage.
 2. Seeing what was happening, Ellen finished off the accompaniment as if he was supposed to sing only two rather than three verses.
 3. Later Ellen commented on this incident as one of the reasons why it's good to have live accompaniment.
 4. Rather than canned accompaniment blindly playing through another verse with the singer conspicuously absent, or being obviously interrupted in mid stream, both of which would have emphasized the boy's failure, Ellen covered for him, and kept him from being any more embarrassed.
- B. Now there can often be more than one lesson from an experience, and today I'd like to suggest a different lesson from the one Ellen identified.
1. And that is that you have to really know the music if you are going to be able to sing it reliably.
 2. You have to have the music penetrated so deeply into your being that it becomes second nature to you—that it just flows out of who you are.
- C. And this is a critical lesson for us as we consider our king's expectation that we will "Sing Songs of the Kingdom in the Midst of the Kingdom of The World."
1. We need to know the songs of the kingdom so well that we can sing them with confidence as we're out there in the midst of the world.
 2. You can't perform a song very well if you have only a passing awareness of its words and music.
 - a. You don't prepare for a concert by just scanning the score.
 - b. Rather you pore over it. You practice it over and over. You memorize it. You make it part of yourself.
 - c. You lift the words and notes from the paper and turn them into the music of action and behavior.
 - d. And you do it over and over again until it's second nature.
- D. Ellen's scared student really drives that point home—If we are going to be credible singers of the songs of the kingdom as we perform them on the stage of the world, we have to make the music part of ourselves.
- II. This point about making the music part of ourselves is graphically illustrated in Colossians 3:16 which says, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

- A. This is a perfect illustration of how we prepare to sing the songs of the kingdom—we need to *Let the word of Christ dwell in (us) richly*.
1. Now the way we *Let the word of Christ dwell in (us) richly is to read it, study it, memorize it, practice it over and over*, lifting the words and notes from the paper and turning them into the music of action and behavior.
 2. With the word of Christ dwelling within us, we will be able to *teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, which is the first kind of way we sing in the reign—telling the good news*.
 3. Second, we will be able to *sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in our hearts to God, which is the second kind of way we sing in the reign—actually singing*.
- B. Now what does it mean to have *The word of Christ dwell in us richly*?
1. It means quite simply to know it, and to know it well.
 2. If we are to sing songs of the kingdom in the midst of the world we have to be thoroughly, completely filled with the good news of Jesus Christ.
 - a. We have to get more of the word of God deeply imbedded in our hearts and minds.
 - b. By constant exposure and constant practice we need to allow ourselves to be shaped by God's word—by its radical message of love and forgiveness and patience and acceptance.
 3. Now one of the ways we can allow *the word of Christ to dwell in us richly* is *memorization*.
 - a. This is something I seldom preach about because I feel so guilty about my own failures in this area.
 - (1) I memorized a lot as a child—Bible School, Sunday School, Bible Memory, but I've forgotten most of it.
 - (2) I haven't experienced what some people say—that what you memorize as a child is carved in stone in your mind.
 - (3) And every time I try to work on memorization as an adult I burn out very quickly.
 - (a) Several years ago I made an effort to memorize the book of Ephesians.
 - (b) But it was hard work, and I gradually let it slide into one of those categories that I'm working on it and will get back to it as soon as I have the time.
 - b. But I have no excuse, and neither do the many other Christians who dismiss the importance of memorization.
 - (1) Devout Jews can quote large passages from the Torah or even the whole thing.
 - (2) Many Muslims can quote large sections of the Koran.

- (3) And there's no question but that Christians need to have more of God's word stored in our hearts.
4. A second way we can allow the word of Christ to dwell in us richly is by *reading, study and meditation so that the scriptures may penetrate into us.*
- a. Here we're looking at becoming familiar with the scriptures.
- (1) We're unlikely to memorize all 66 books of the Bible, or 29 books of NT, or 4 gospels, or even one epistle, as my futile attempt on Ephesians showed me.
- (2) But we can work at mastering what the Bible's words say—understanding its principles and insights in order that we might turn them into behavior and actions.
- b. *We need to practice what the words say, lifting them from the page to turn them into behavior, just as the musician lifts the notes and words from the pages to turn them into music.*
- C. Becoming intensely aware of the words on the page is something that God emphasized through Moses in Deuteronomy.
1. In chapter 6 he says, *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*
- a. What this presents is an active involvement with the word of God with it being a constant companion and always on our minds.
- b. First you install God's words in your hearts and minds.
- c. Then you teach them to your children.
- d. You make them a part of your daily conversation.
- e. And you create physical reminders of them to wear on your bodies and mount in your homes.
2. The Jews take this literally and some devout Jews even do this today.
- a. I'm wearing phylacteries (Greek) or tefillin (Aramaic) this morning.
- (1) A phylactery or tefillin is a leather box containing four texts from the Torah handwritten on parchment which is worn on the forehead and the left arm.
- (2) This is in direct obedience to *Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*
- (3) What I am wearing is just a rough approximation of real phylacteries or tefillins.
- (4) I had these made by a leatherworker at Oak Grove when I

depicted the Pharisee Simeon ben Johanan for Advent one year before I had access to the internet.

(5) When I went tefillin shopping on the web this week I found very exacting descriptions of the criteria an acceptable phylactery had to meet *and costs in the \$4-800 range.*

(6) I know it seems silly, but then, wearing these is a constant reminder of God and his word.

(7) And I wonder what difference it would make for us if we literally wore the Word of God on our bodies as a symbol of how we treasured it in our hearts and minds.

b. A second literal way Jews obey this text is to use mezuzahs.

(1) A mezuzah is a holder containing handwritten Hebrew texts which is mounted on a doorframe.

(2) Jews do this in obedience to *Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

(3) These holders can be anything from cheap clear plastic to very artistically done and expensive.

(4) Scroll has to be handwritten in Hebrew—the ones I priced were about \$40.00.

(5) Mezuzahs are mounted diagonally on the doorframe because rabbis can't agree on horizontal or vertical.

(6) Some, just the front door, some every door in the house.

(7) Touch every time pass through the door to remind you.

(8) You can't help but wonder what a difference it would make if we would install that momentary reminder of God's word into our daily routine and coming and going in life.

3. We Christians are quick to find fault with the legalism of these devout Jews, but their mezuzahs and *tefillin or phylacteries are graphic reminders of how the word of God is to be a constant presence in our lives.*

4. Since before the time of Jesus, largely through the efforts of the Pharisees, Jews have made mastery of their scriptures a critical element.

D. *Deuteronomy 30:14 develops the reason for mastery of the scriptures when it says that you have to have the word /very near you,/ in your mouth /and in your heart— so you may obey it.*

1. So that you may lift the words from the page and turn them into action.

2. Here we come to the crux of the issue. We need to know scripture well so that we can obey it—so that we can sing it. *So that when we're on*

stage before the world, we won't, like that student, fail to sing the song.

3. Jesus emphasized this in *Luke 11:28* when he said, "*Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*"

- a. By "hear" Jesus means more than having the words of the Word vibrate on our eardrums.
- b. He means the hearing of taking it in and making it part of oneself—of reading it, of studying it, of memorizing it, of meditating on it—of having it *dwell in (us) richly*.
- c. And then the obeying part is the singing it—the lifting the words from the page to turn them into behavior.
- d. When you know the music of the Word well, when it dwells in you richly, you are able to obey and sing it confidently.

4. The importance of knowing the music well—of moving from hearing the word to obeying it—is portrayed so well in "The Parable of the Two Houses" in *Luke 6*.

a. *I will show you what he is like who hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.*"

b. Now in both cases the homeowner had heard the Word.

c. The issue was whether he put it into practice or not.

E. What we need to do is to grow deeply familiar with the word of God and then to lift the words and notes from the page and turn them into action.

1. Jesus says in *Luke 8:21*, "*My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice.*"

2. And in *Luke 11:28* He says, "*Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*"

3. It is by that obeying—that putting into practice—that we sing the songs of the kingdom in the midst of the reign of the world.

- III. Here I think we stumble across one of the most severe problems of “Singing Songs of the Kingdom in the Midst of the Kingdom of This World.”
- A. There are too many people who don’t know the music well enough to lift the notes and words from the page and turn them into song.
 - 1. In seminary I was impressed by a book entitled, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*, and it hasn’t gotten any better over the years.
 - 2. There are too many people who assume that reading, studying and memorizing the Word and practicing lifting the words and notes from the page into the air are optional.
 - B. They have fallen err to the misconception that if you have heard the music and can hum along, that’s good enough.
 - C. But the truth of the matter is that it takes more than just passing familiarity with the score. It takes mastering the score. Knowing it deeply and well.
 - D. So let’s revisit our scale in the bulletin.
 - 1. I says, I don’t know the score all that well and I must admit that I don’t do a very good job of lifting the words from the page to create music.
 - 2. 5 says, I’ve spent some time with the score, but I have to admit I could know it a lot better and do a better job of lifting the words from the page.
 - 3. 10 says, the score of God’s word dwells richly in me and I daily lift the words and notes of God’s word off the page to sing songs of the kingdom in the midst of the reign of the world.
 - 4. Now of course, as always, the really important thing about reflecting on the scale is not the concert you sang last week, but the concert you’ll sing next week.
 - 5. What are you going to do this week to master more of the music of the word of God in order that you might sing songs of the kingdom in the midst of the reign of the world?