

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: THE GIFTS OF MUSIC AND OF SONG

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 119:6 a-d.

The service of song in the house of the Lord with humility and unity of Spirit in them that sing and them that hear is blessed, and acceptable with God; but song with grievous sadness in them that sing and bitterness of spirit in them that hear is not pleasing to God. Therefore, in all the congregations of the people of God, let all strife and contention concerning song service cease; and that the worship in the house of the Lord may be complete and wholly acceptable, let them who shall be moved thereto by a desire and the gift to sing take upon them the burden and care of the service, and use therein instruments of music of the reed and of the string, or instruments of brass in congregations that are large, and as wisdom and choice may direct. Let the young men and the maidens cultivate the gifts of music and of song, and let not the middle aged and the old forget the gladness of their youth, and let them aid and assist so far as their cares will permit; and remember that saints should be cheerful in their warfare that they may be joyous in their triumph.

My soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the
righteous is a prayer unto me. (Doctrine and Covenants 24:3)

Music is one of the oldest forms of expressions of worship. Its use is well-nigh universal, in all religions, in all ages, times, and places. As early as the fourth chapter of Genesis Jubal is mentioned as the "father of all such as handle the harp and organ."

The Hebrew nation cultivated little sculpture or painting -- perhaps because of the prohibition against graven images in their Mosaic law, but their national culture did lean strongly towards music. We know almost nothing about their music. We know of no musical instrument which they invented; but we do know that they were skilled in the use of many musical instruments borrowed from the nations around them. The greatest of their ancient musicians was David, whose skill on the harp drove an evil spirit out of Saul, and whose Psalms are still a blessing to all Christian and Jewish people.

Music was an indispensable part of Israel's temple worship. The temple chorus and orchestra numbered over four thousand musicians who were trained in twenty-four divisions. Each group always included both experts and novices -- the experts to preserve and hand on the traditional music which so far as we know was never written down -- and the novices to furnish the freshness and enthusiasm

of youth. When national calamity caused the temple music to cease, such prophets as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Amos pointed out that this lack of music was a punishment for national sins; and with each restoration or reformation of temple worship, there came also a revival of the temple chorus and orchestra.

The early Christian church continued the Jewish musical tradition, and enlarged upon it, developing certain liturgical forms which have become more or less traditional in many Christian churches. It is worthy of note that up to the time of Bach, it was the Christian church which sponsored, directed, and encouraged most of the composition and the performance of music. Most good musicians wrote for the church service, and many of them performed for it.

In spite of this seemingly universal acceptance of music as a form of worship, music in the church has very often been a source of bitter contention. We have not time to notice all the differences of opinion which have caused division. One of the early disputes was between the "slow" singers, who would tolerate nothing but the slow psalm tunes, and the "quick" singers, who advocated the more modern hymn. Another division of opinion was between those who would tolerate no

instrumental music at all in the church, and those who thought instruments quite proper in worship. Another difference of opinion was between those who advocated only choral singing, and those who liked an occasional solo. There was contention between those who advocated only unison singing, and those who advocated harmony or part singing.

Very soon after the beginnings of this church under the direction of Joseph Smith, Emma Smith, his wife, was instructed by revelation to make a selection of hymns for the use of the church, with this reason: "For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me. And it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads." W.W. Phelps, editor of the church periodicals in those early days, wrote new hymns for the new church, or paraphrased old ones to suit the church's theology. A choir sang at the dedication of the first major building erected by the church -- the Kirtland Temple. Yet there were still some who grudged music its place in the worship service of the church.

When Joseph Smith III, son of the prophet and founder of the church, came into his father's place in 1860, there were more essential things to be concerned about. The church had been scattered and its leadership divided since the prophet's death in 1844. The first task was to re-assemble and unite as many of the scattered fragments as possible. For a while music was neglected; but as its use in worship grew, some of the people still were contentious about the question of music in the church.

In 1887 a revelation came through the young prophet, from which we read at the beginning of this service. It commanded that all strife and contention concerning the song service should cease. It commanded that in order that the worship in the house of the Lord might be complete, and wholly acceptable, music should have its place in that worship. It said that music "with unity of Spirit in them that sing and them that hear is blessed, and acceptable with God, but that "song with grievous sadness in them that sing and bitterness of spirit in them that hear is not pleasing to God." It is possible to worship God without music. Private worship or prayer is almost necessarily done without music. But public or corporate worship is incomplete,

and therefore not wholly acceptable to God, according to this revelation, unless music has some part in that worship.

To implement these commands, the revelation further commanded that those who were specially gifted should take the lead in this musical worship; that the young men and maidens should cultivate the gifts of music and of song in order that such leadership might be improved; that the middle aged and old should aid and assist; and that saints should be cheerful in their warfare that they might be joyous in their triumph. The question of instrumental music was settled with a command that instruments of reed, string, or brass might be used, as wisdom and choice directed. There was no interdiction of suitable and proper solos in worship, but the emphasis was on congregational singing -- one form of worship in which everyone present may participate.

Unity in worship is best achieved through music. There is no other form of worship which offers such opportunity for participation by every worshipper-- whatever his age or physical condition or degree of education and intellectual achievement. There is inspiration and spiritual uplift to be found in both the words and the music of a good hymn. Oftentimes a hymn set to music and sung by the congregation can be a better method of teaching the great and eternal truths of the gospel than can the sermon itself. The rhythm of a good hymn or other music can stimulate and revive the spirits of men. The melody and harmony of a good hymn can comfort the sorrowing, bring peace to the confused and the weary, and bind the entire congregation in unity of spirit and purpose.

We are still striving as a church to live up to the spirit, as well as the letter of this revelation -- to encourage our young men and maidens to cultivate the gifts of music and of song -- to lift the standards of congregational singing, as well as of choir singing, organ and other instrumental playing, and solo work in its proper place. We encourage our people to sing, to be familiar with the hymns that will make the service of worship complete and wholly acceptable in the sight of God, and with the great religious music of all ages. We have found that God does delight in the song of the heart, and that the song of the righteous which is sung with prayerful heart is answered with a blessing on their heads.