

Now Performing: The Original Gospel Choir

How to Get to Heaven from Earth – Part VIII

Romans 10:15-20

Introduction

Has it ever occurred to you that when we sing, we are joining in a practice that has been around since the creation of the world?

Job informs us that when God laid the cornerstone of the universe and the foundations of His creation, the morning stars – the angels – sang together! (Job 38:6-7) This was the original gospel choir – a great choir of millions of angels singing praise to God as they watched Him create the universe.

Revelation informs us that when the universe is recreated, with a new heaven and a new earth, there will be a saturation of music and we will join with the hosts of heaven in singing to God.

So all we are doing here is tuning up! That means that music on Sunday morning is not a prelude to what really matters in the service – *music* matters!

Martin Luther, the reformer, once said that “sacred music is the handmaiden of theology.” It is not a wonder that he wrote hymns for his congregation to sing – and we have been singing them ever since.

It is also no surprise that one Jesuit priest, in the sixteenth century, complained about the lingering effects of Martin Luther’s ministry. His complaint was interesting, for he said, “Luther has [stolen away] more people with his hymns than with all his sermons.”

The power of music to soothe, to convict, to challenge, and to encourage the believer is impossible to estimate fully. Even in the secular

world, the power of music is undeniable. Have you noticed that they never produce just a movie – they produce a movie theme; an orchestration that moves you.

One medical doctor recently said, “Half an hour of music produced in many patients the same effect as ten milligrams of Valium.”

We see that effect in I Samuel, chapter 16, verse 23, when David would bring his harp and play it before King Saul and,

... Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

Are you troubled? Are you anxious? Are you distracted? Are you tempted? What kind of music are you listening to on the way to work; around the apartment; on the way home from work? Who are your musical counselors?

Someone once said that Country and Western music was inherently depressing. He joked that if you played it backward, you would get your girlfriend back, your pick-up truck back, and your dog back – so play it backward!

To whom have you given permission to move your soul?! I challenge you to choose music that deepens your affections to God, points your eyes toward heaven, and elevates your attraction for spiritual things.

We often ask each other, “How’s your prayer life?” or “How’s your Bible study life?” Have you ever thought of asking someone, “How’s your music life?” Try that one.

A. W. Tozer once wrote,

I say without qualification, after the sacred scriptures, the next best companion for the soul is [sacred music]. Sometimes our hearts are strangely stubborn and will not soften or grow tender no matter how much praying we do. At such times, it is often found that the reading or singing of a good hymn will melt the ice jam and start the inward affections flowing again.

Is music man's idea? Did we come up with it because we were bored during winter? No, it was God's idea!

Warren Wiersbe pointed out that each member of the triune God sings!

- God the Father sings! The prophet Zephaniah wrote, "***The Lord your God is in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness . . . He will rejoice over you with singing.***" (*Zephaniah 3:17 NKJV*)
- God the Son sings! Matthew recorded of Christ and His disciples when they were in the upper room, "***And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.***" (*Matthew 26:30 NKJV*)
- God the Spirit sings through us! Paul writes that we are to, "***. . . be filled with the Spirit [of God], speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,***" (*Ephesians 5:18b-19 NKJV*)ⁱ

Music is not the idea of man, it is the idea of God. God was the first lyricist; the first choir director that ever was. He is, in fact, the original composer of gospel music.

You are now probably wondering, "What in the world does this have to do with Romans, chapter 10?"

I have found it fascinating that the apostle Paul summarizes his argument about the lost condition of not only the Jews, but the whole world by quoting gospel music. This great Jewish attorney pulls out two songs and uses them to finalize his testimony that the unbelieving world is responsible for their unbelief.

Has Everyone Heard the Gospel of Christ?

Now, before we dive in, you have studied this letter with me enough to observe how Paul often anticipated the objection of his audience, verbalized

their objection, and then answered it. He does the same thing in verse 18 of Romans, chapter 10.

Let us back up two verses and begin with verses 16 and 17.

However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Now here comes the objection. Begin at verse 18a.

But I say, surely they have never heard, have they?

Paul anticipates the objection, saying, "We didn't all hear the word of Christ, did we?"

The truth is, the Jewish nation had heard the gospel – from Moses, through the prophets, from the Lord Himself, and, more recently, from the apostles.

It is as if Paul is saying, "Let me answer that question by playing a song, right out of your own hymnal. It's on page number 19 and there are several stanzas to this great gospel song."

The song goes like this:

***The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of
His hands.***

***Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.***

***There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.***

***Their line has gone out through all the
earth,***

***And their utterances to the end of the
world....***

(Psalm 19:1-4)

This last line is the stanza Paul quotes in verse 18 of Romans, chapter 10,

***. . . Their voice has gone out into all the
earth, . . .***

The word translated "voice" is a rare Greek word – it is the word "phthong". This is a word that was created to sound like that which it was describing. "Phthong, phthong, . . ." is the sound of a harp or guitar string being plucked. It is a musical word that literally refers to the vibration of a musical string being plucked.

The word only appears two times in the Bible. It occurs in this verse in Romans, chapter 10, and a

second time in I Corinthians, chapter 14, when Paul talks about the sounds of the harp and other musical instruments.

In other words, Paul is saying that the sound of the gospel has been vibrating around the world through the musical instrumentation of creation.

Can you hear the music? Can you read the lyrics?

By quoting David, Paul actually expands the application beyond the Jewish people and the Roman empire. In other words, everyone can be exposed to the Creator's musical masterpiece – this collection of voices; this grand gospel choir called Creation. It is now playing! Day after day and night unto night, their voices are heard throughout the whole earth.

Add to the general revelation of creation, the special revelation of the scriptures. The rapid progress of the gospel throughout the first century is an amazement to any historian.

Justin Martyr, in the middle of the second century wrote, "There is no people, Greek or barbarian, or of another race, by whatever appellation or manners they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus."

Fifty years later, Tertullian added, "We are but of yesterday, and yet we already fill your cities, islands, camps, palaces, senate, and forum. We have left alone only your temples."

You might say, "But today, in the twenty-first century, there are roughly one and a half billion people who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ."

That is true, but there are three and a half billion who have. More importantly, you have!ⁱⁱ

How have you responded to the music?

Go back to Romans, chapter 1, for a moment, and reread what Paul says in verses 20 through 22.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools,

In other words, instead of accepting the truth of a divine Creator, mankind has sought to explain Him away. They give the praise to nature, or to chance, or to evolutionary process. We hear the music; we see the lyrics of beauty and symmetry and order, but we refuse to give glory to a Creator.

So Paul takes the lyrics of David's old gospel hymn and counters the objection by saying, "You can't say you haven't heard the music; you can't say you didn't read the lyrics – the vibration of the created order, like the sound of string that's been plucked, reverberates around the world!"

Today, when you share the gospel of this Creator, what do people say? They say, "You believe all this came from Jesus Christ, the Creator?"

Colossians, chapter 1, by the way, informs us that the second Person of the godhead, the Son of God, was the agent of creation. Paul writes in verses 16 and 17,

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

"You mean you actually believe that?"

Four responses to the gospel

When you share the gospel with people, you will discover one of four different kinds of people. The Lord spelled it out in Matthew, chapter 13, as He talked about the four different kinds of soils upon which the seed of the gospel falls. These include:

- The defiant – they are hardened people, like a path where the ground is hard, and the seed never even gets a hearing.
- The disillusioned – they seem to receive the gospel until persecution or difficulty comes along, and then they abandon the faith.
- The deviant – they also seem to receive the gospel until they prosper, and then the attraction of the world and the lure of money becomes their god and they abandon any desire for the true God.
- The disciple – they receive the word and embrace it, bearing fruit in service and fellowship with Christ and His church.

Many hear the sounds of creation (general revelation) and some hear even more – the sound of special revelation – but they respond with unbelief.

In Romans, chapter 9, Paul spells out election, and you are left with the somewhat uncomfortable truth of God’s sovereignty. Then you get to Romans, chapter 10, and Paul spells out human accountability to believe. In Romans, chapter 9, it is all up to God; in Romans, chapter 10, it is up to man.

Mankind will answer to God for their unbelief. No one will ever stand before God and say, “You didn’t elect me, so You shouldn’t send me to hell.”

No, every person will stand before Creator God and give an account for their disbelief. They heard the music and rejected it; they read the lyrics and refused to sing along.

Paul does not try to reconcile Romans, chapter 9, and Romans, chapter 10.

For you today, the message is simple – listen to the gospel choir of God’s creation, and join the choir! Sign up and sing along.

Paul says, “They heard . . . they heard.”

That old gospel song written by David has told the Jewish people, and tells us – they heard.

I remember reading the funny story of the older man who was very concerned with his wife’s hearing loss. He went to their trusted doctor and asked for advice – he was convinced she would never admit to it.

The doctor asked, “How bad is her hearing?”

He said, “Pretty bad – there are many times when she doesn’t respond when I talk to her.”

The doctor replied, “Well, let’s experiment. When you go home, say something to her with her back turned to you. If she doesn’t respond, get a little closer and speak a little louder. Do that until she responds and we’ll be able to determine just how bad it is.”

The man said, “Okay,” and went home.

He found his wife at the kitchen sink with her back to the door. He stood in the doorway and said, “What’s for supper.”

No response.

He walked a little closer and said louder, “What’s for supper.”

No response.

He got right behind her and loudly said, “What’s for supper.”

She wheeled around and said, “For the third time, we’re having soup.”

Like that man, the Jewish people especially thought everyone else could not hear God like they could hear God . . . but in reality, their ears were not tuned into hearing the wonderful sound of this universal gospel music.

Has Everyone Understood the Gospel of Christ?

Now the objection comes, “Well, maybe they heard, but maybe they don’t understand.”

Notice verse 19a of Romans, chapter 10.

But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? . . .

They did not know, or “ginosko” in the Greek, they did not understand, did they?

Once again, Paul says, “Let me answer that by playing another gospel song – only this was written and sung by Moses.”

Notice verse 19 again, the last part.

. . . First Moses says, “I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, by a nation without understanding will I anger you.”

That does not sound like much of a song to me!

Moses sang this after commissioning Joshua. He will die soon after. The song appears in Deuteronomy, chapter 32, and Moses is recounting the power of God, the grace of God, and the history of Israel. He is also prophesying events in Israel’s future. One of the things Moses sings is that Israel will become jealous when God embraces Gentile people.

Isaiah sings along with Moses in verse 20 of Romans, chapter 10. Look at that verse – God is being quoted.

And Isaiah is very bold and says, “I was found by those who did not seek Me, I became manifest to those who did not ask for Me.”

In other words, the Jewish people thought they were exclusively the people of God – they were the people of the law; they were the people of prayer; they had God in their corner only! Now, however, they discover that the gospel goes to the world – which includes a few billion Gentiles – and the Jews become angry and jealous.

You might say, “Now wait a second. I thought the objection (in verse 19) was that Israel didn’t understand the gospel. How does the fact that Israel is jealous of Gentiles answer the objection that they didn’t understand?”

If the Jews had not understood the gospel, they would not have cared that Gentiles believed the gospel. Their attitude would be, “Who cares what the Gentiles believe?!”

The jealousy and anger of the Jews indicated that they understood very well what was happening. They knew that the message being received by the Gentiles was a message of salvation by the grace of God apart from keeping the law. They knew it was being taught, not as fulfillment of Judaism, but as a contradiction to Judaism. That is why they were so angry.ⁱⁱⁱ

The emotion of the Jews revealed their understanding.

Did both women know which mother the baby really belonged to, even though they were both claiming him as their own, as they stood before Solomon?

Solomon said, “Bring me a sword. We’ll divide the baby and each woman can have half.”

One woman said, “Sure, why not.”

The real mother cried out, “Oh please, let her have the baby. Don’t harm him.”

Solomon said, “That woman is the real mother. Give the baby to her.”

Emotional response revealed the heart.

Did the Jew understand the gospel? Oh yes, they did. That is why they were so angry that God was offering the gospel of His grace to the Gentile as much as He was offering it to them. They were livid; they were jealous.

God was no longer in their corner alone!

Paul proved his point.

Emotion revealed understanding.

You might share the gospel with someone and they might get angry with you and curse at you, and say, “I don’t need that stuff. I don’t care about God. My life is fine without you bunch of hypocrites bothering me. I’m fine just the way I am!”

Oh? Their emotion contradicts their vocabulary. Their anger reveals their anxiety.

Was Israel ignorant of the gospel?

Types of ignorance

There are certain kinds of ignorance that God does not excuse – and neither do we.

Neglecting knowledge

1. First, there is the ignorance that comes from neglecting knowledge.

You neglected to read the fine print of the contract, but you are still responsible to fulfill the conditions.

Another illustration would be a time when you are driving along, minding your own business, going the speed limit, and suddenly a policeman pulls up behind you with their lights flashing. Have you ever been pulled over? Do we have an audience full of criminals?!

The policeman says, “I’m sorry sir, but you were going ten miles over the speed limit.”

“No sir, I was going 45 miles an hour – that’s the speed limit.”

“Yes sir, but the speed limit changed just up the road to 35 miles an hour because you were in a school zone. Didn’t you see the sign?”

“Sign? What sign?”

So what happens to me? Does the officer say, “What, you didn’t see the sign? Well, never mind then. I’m sorry to have bothered you. Have a nice day.”?

The truth is, I am still responsible, simply because knowledge was available.

Willful blindness

2. There is another inexcusable form of ignorance, and that is ignorance which comes from willful blindness.^{iv}

We call that “turning a blind eye”! We shut our eyes so we do not see what we do not want to see. We plug our ears so we do not hear what we do not want to hear.

You might say, for example, “I’ve taped the game so I can see it tomorrow. Don’t tell me what the final score is.”

This is purposefully avoiding exposure to the truth.

Do you remember the old television show *Hogan’s Heroes*? I am dating myself to tell you that I watched that show when the episodes were not reruns. If you watched that show, you probably remember the old German guard named Shultz. As

long as one of Hogan's men, usually the little French guy, baked him some goodies, Shultz would not see them coming out of the escape tunnel. He would give his famous line, "I see nothing . . . I know nothing."

The truth was, he did see it, but he chose to act like he did not so that he could eat the goodies they had baked for him.

The world covers their eyes and says, "I don't see the lyrics of the gospel."

Paul pulls out an old hymn from David's bestselling collection and says, "Let me sing this song for you . . . the one about creation."

The world covers their ears and says, "I don't hear the music of the gospel."

Paul pulls out another hymn, recorded and sung by Moses, which talked about their angry, bitter hearts toward the grace of God, before whom they are accountable – which proved they had heard the gospel all along.

Conclusion

Let me make one closing statement and one closing challenge.

The statement is:

The music of the gospel points to a divine Conductor – so worship Him.

That is the obvious conclusion.

Paul's use of music to bring his charge and challenge to a close leaves us little doubt that we have heard from God and that we do understand our accountability to God.

There is only one thing to do – worship Him!

A couple of weeks ago, I finished reading the biography of Mozart. Let me tell a few interesting facts about his life.

When Mozart was two years of age, he used to sit on the floor near the piano-forte (a small piano, more like a harpsichord). He would sit there as his older sister received piano lessons from their father, who

was a rather brilliant musician in his own right. One day, he stood up after a lesson, toddled over to the piano, reached up and played a chord, then another chord, then another, but struck a wrong note, to which he responded by bursting into tears and he would not be consoled.

When he was four, his father came home one day to find Mozart in a mess – paper everywhere, the ink well turned over. Mozart was in the middle of it, composing his first piano number. He was writing musical notes before he learned to write letters.

By the age of six, Mozart was playing before kings and queens of Europe.

As a young adult, he was known to rush into the house after being away, yelling, "Pen, paper . . . pen, paper." So passionate and single minded was Mozart about writing down the music that constantly played in his head.

His symphonies would be written out completely, without any erasure, without any correction, without ever having to start over again.

Joseph Hayden called his young friend, "Mozart the great".

You would never be tempted to listen to *Figaro*, or some other opera, or symphony, or piano sonata, and think, "What an amazing piece of music!" without thinking, "What an amazing composer there must be!"

I was riding last evening to a dinner appointment with some of my family, and I saw the sun setting – the sky was brilliant orange and purple. I could do nothing more than gape, and say, "Wow, what a magnificent sight! Lord, what a magnificent Creator You are!"

Are you defiant . . . disillusioned . . . deviant? I invite you to become a disciple – to listen to the gospel choir of God's creation – and join the rest of us in singing praise to our magnificent Savior!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/17/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations and Quotes (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 464.

ⁱⁱ James Montgomery Boice, Romans: Volume 3 (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 1273.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 1274.

^{iv} William Barclay, Letter to the Romans (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 142.