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Singing in the Dark: Join the Choir

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By GERALD A. KLINGBEIL

Singing in the Dark

Join the choir.



BILL KNOTT

The year was 1529. The place was Spire, Germany. A small band of Protestant princes were on their way to participate in the Diet of Spire, convened by Emperor Charles V. This was not a singing group. They looked perplexed and worried. Faced with immense pressures from both the emperor and the papal party, they had two options: either uphold their commitment to Scripture and the Reformation (and face terrible civil war and persecution) or succumb to the pressures of the majority and recant the principle of liberty of speech and conscience.¹ It is said that Martin Luther composed “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” for this particular occasion—the moment when life, faith, and the future of the Reformation hung in the balance.

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;

Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.

For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;

His craft and power are great;

*and armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

No Singing Event

Fifteen hundred years earlier a small group of men and women huddled together fearfully. The shadow of the cross loomed on a hill. The earth itself seemed to be in mourning, and darkness and tremors had unnerved the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Jesus was dead, their beloved Master would not walk with them again to touch the undeserving and neglected and preach the kingdom of God—or so they thought. Imagine the sense of disillusionment, fear, and agony the disciples must have felt. Sabbath saw their highest hopes and wildest dreams crushed, and they were afraid for their own lives. No one felt like singing. They hid in the upper room and fearfully waited.

The next morning two of the disciples were on their way home.² Their way to Emmaus stretched out before them for seven long miles. Their hearts were empty; their hopes had been crushed. And yet at the end of their journey, after they recognized the risen Savior, they were

bursting to shout (and sing) the good news of an empty tomb. “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” they asked each other (Luke 24:32), and notwithstanding another long journey and the dangers of night travel, they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the others.

*Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,*

*Were not the right man on our side,
the man of God’s own choosing.*

Dost ask who that may be?

Christ Jesus, it is He,

Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same,

And He must win the battle.

More Singing

Throughout history God chooses strange moments to do His singing. The second half of the seventh century B.C. is marked by major changes and challenges in the ancient Near East. The Neo-Assyrian Empire is on the decline and a new power, located in ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia,

is beginning to assert its influence and might. Judah, under King Josiah, has been given another opportunity, and a great reform is under way. The king is supported by prophetic voices; one of them sits now tucked in between Habakkuk and Haggai among the 12 minor prophets. Zephaniah is a unique prophetic book. Its author must have been a member of the royal family, as his genealogy (Zeph. 1:1) reaches back four generations to King Hezekiah.

When God speaks through Zephaniah,

amidst of evil and judgment and destruction a song is about to be sung over God's remnant people. Listen carefully to its words: "The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing" (Zeph. 3:17, NIV).³ God is not a distant, far-removed god—He wants to be close to His people and is about to utter a song, a loud song, of joy over those who have relied upon His Word, who

From Mourning to Singing

Zephaniah, the pre-Resurrection disciples, the German Protestant princes—they all should not have sung. Darkness was all around them; judgment was imminent; destruction was sure—and yet, they joined the choir and sang in harmony with the God who Himself is ready to sing out for joy over His creation.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;

The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth:

Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;

The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still,

His kingdom is forever.

His kingdom is forever, and ever—and ever. In the midst of our own darkness, can you already hear the music? ■

*Every divine message of impending judgment also contains a call to **return** and a glimpse of divine restoration.*

niah, He addresses Judah and Jerusalem. When you find a moment spend some time reading the entire book in one go (which will not take too long). Chapter one feels like a huge tsunami is rolling toward Jerusalem. It's judgment time and God's people do not seem to get it. It's end-time for Jerusalem, and idolatry, oppression, or plain apathy just seem to go on as they have gone on before. This is no time for joyous songs of worship. This is crunch time. "The great Day of the Lord is near" (Zeph. 1:14), the prophet shouts, and it is bigger than just Judah and Jerusalem (Zeph. 1:14-2:3).

Zephaniah, however, does not stop there. Every divine message of impending judgment also contains a call to return and a glimpse of divine restoration (Zeph. 3:1-13). In the

trusted His leading and relished His grace. This is not, however, a sentimental love song celebrating the good vibes of religious experience. It is God's melodious shout of victory—the only reference in Scripture where we find God singing.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.

The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;

His rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure,

One little word shall fell him.

¹ Read about the history of what came to be known as the "protest of Spies" (thus "Protestants") in Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1950), pp. 197-210.

² Read the story again in Luke 24:13-35 and capture the transformation happening on this momentous first day of the week.

³ Scripture quotations credited to NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. ESV has "exult over you with loud singing"; NASB translates "rejoice over you with shouts of joy." Scripture quotations marked ESV are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the *New American Standard Bible*, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.



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