

Worship, Music Styles, and Why We Can't Get Along

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

Bible Text: Psalm 50
Preached On: Sunday, August 2, 2020

Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

Alright, First Baptist family, it is Sunday night, 6 o'clock Central Standard Time and as we've shared during this global pandemic, it is the Sunday night all you can eat Bible buffet. That's right, for the next 59 to 60 minutes we are gonna sink our teeth into Scripture. You know, one of the blessings of this pandemic is it has allowed us because of kind of the structure of things to adapt and I'm not here to say that things won't return as they used to be at some point but it is interesting how many complimentary messages I've received of the fact that we are still going live anytime we would normally have an opportunity and that we are continuing even when we don't have access maybe sometimes to the style and structures we're used to, to continue to at least biblical content.

So with that being said, tonight I want to encourage you to turn in your Bibles to the end of the book of Psalms, in fact, we're going to be in Psalm 147 a little bit, mainly 148, all the way through 150. Now don't panic when you look up these passages, it doesn't take up that much of your Bible, they're actually very short, and tonight we're going to address a subject matter that I believe is important and necessary. We, the church, we, the people of Jesus Christ, have become very divisive among ourselves in recent days when it comes to the means and the ways in which we worship publicly. You've heard we joke you get two Baptists together, you're gonna get three opinions, on this one, there's probably more than three, and we're gonna deal, in fact, the title of tonight's message is accurate. Now it may look like I've got two of the words mixed up, the title is "Worship, Music Styles, and Why We Can't Get Along. Now you may have thought I messed up two of the words and it should be "why can't we get along," but I want to kind of put that before you as we approach the end of the message tonight, is we're gonna see the reason why we can't and when we understand why we can't, if we'll allow God to solve that issue in our life, then we can change it to "why can't we all get along." But until we address the issues, until we address the struggles, then we have to leave the words in their current order.

So as we turn to the end of the book of Psalms, I want to begin actually just with the first verse of Psalm 147, then we're gonna read the entirety of Psalms 148-150, but 147, the very first verse addresses the why of worship, the why of public worship. It says,

1 Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.

One of the things that I've shared with you over time is that what we know as biblical Christianity is the only singing faith. We're the only faith that sings because we're the only one that has anything worth singing about. We typically sing about that which is important to us, that which is emotional to us, that which is critical to us, and other faith systems in the world, some of them have public discourses, some of them even have chants, so to speak, or large statements that they repeat, but as far as a singing faith, you do not have music stations with other faith system music being played irregardless of what the style may or may not be. And so when we look at that first verse of Psalm 147, the why of tonight is that we are commanded to praise because it is a faith worth singing about.

When we get to Psalm 148, we find out who is it that has been called to praise because you may be like I am tonight, you may be one of those folks that says, "I don't sing well. I've never been on tune. I've never been on pitch. I don't enjoy it. It's just something that's not natural to me." Well, I hate to tell you but you, as I, are without excuse because in Psalm 148 listen to what it says the qualifications or the personas that are to praise the Lord.

1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. 2 Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. 3 Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. 4 Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created. 6 He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass. 7 Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: 8 Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word: 9 Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: 10 Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl: 11 Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: 12 Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children: 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven. 14 He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the LORD.

Now this evening, every single one of you listening to my voice either here in person or online qualifies under those distinctions. In fact, even the Lord made it very clear that if we, humanity, did not praise him, that the rocks would cry out.

It's when you get to Psalm 149 and 150 that tonight we're gonna address, shall we say, the how. How have we been created? How have we been designed? How should we respond to worship? We know this is why we were created, we know that we all qualify to be those that praise the Lord, but how do we actually do so? And I want you to listen to the words as I read them and I want you to hear the instruments that are in great variety. I want you to hear the adjectives that even describe the volume. Beginning in Psalm 149,

1 Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song,

Alright, we're already got a problem there. A new song? In other words, we're supposed to create new music? I thought we were only supposed to sing that which we were already...okay, I digress. Sing a new song,

and his praise in the congregation of saints. 2 Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. 3 Let them praise his name in the dance [there went the Baptists]: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp. 4 For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. 5 Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. 6 Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a twoedged sword in their hand; 7 To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; 8 To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; 9 To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD.

Psalm 150,

1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. 2 Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. 3 Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. 4 Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. 5 Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. 6 Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

Now tonight, I want to look into these Psalms, not necessarily just verse by verse or statement by statement but I want to look at the totality of what we have in Scripture and address this concept that has become so divisive, and my goal tonight is hopefully to bring us to a synthesis, to bring us to an understanding scripturally what the Bible commands and how we as believers, and hopefully Bible believers, should respond.

The first issue that I want to deal with are the parameters of our public worship. Now I know I'm kind of a sports guy so think of a bowling alley for just a moment. We have gutters on the side and the lane that is in the middle. When we talk about the parameters, some of you, let me speak your language: how do we keep it out of the gutter? How do we keep it from being a gutter ball? How do we keep it going down the lane in the proper parameters?

Now there's several things that come to mind here and the first is the style by which we worship and this is where John 4:24 comes in handy. By the way, tonight I'm going to allude to and quote many of verses throughout the text of Scripture, for the sake of time,

I'm not gonna turn to all of them individually and so I will give you ample warning so you may be one of those who likes to see it in order to believe it and I appreciate it. But in John 4, Jesus is having a conversation with an individual that we commonly know as the woman at the well. This is a woman who had had six husbands in days past, she was currently living with a man that was the seventh man, though it was not her husband by legality. She meets Jesus at the well and they have this incredible conversation in regards to physical water versus living water, one that will run out, one that will never run out, but by the time Jesus begins to unpeel the layers in her life and allow her to be exposed for her sinful condition, not to embarrass her but to minister unto her, and by the way this is the same woman that she goes into town in a few verses and brings everybody out to hear the message of Jesus, she says, "I've found the Messiah," that when her life becomes exposed, she kind of throws a curve-ball into the mix and she asks Jesus a very important question. She says, "Okay, where should we worship? Should we worship in Bethel or should we worship in Jerusalem?" Now oftentimes when we approach the text, rightfully so, we see that she's kind of, she's going off on tangent issues but based on what Jesus says in John 4:24, she was in between the gutters, so to speak, and here is why: she was asking Jesus a very important question because where you worship determined whether or not your worship was valid. If you're celebrating the Passover, it doesn't matter what you've brought, if you're in the wrong place, you're in a mess. And so she's asking, "Okay, Jesus, um, do we do it Jerusalem like David established or do we do it in Bethel like the northern kingdom after the divided kingdom came to fruition, where they established?" By the way, Jerusalem means the place of peace but Bethel means the house of God so they both sound very appropriate biblically. What do we do?

Here's what's interesting about that: if you were to use our labels, Jerusalem was traditional and Bethel was contemporary. Jerusalem was the place of old. Bethel was the place of new. Jerusalem was how we've always done it and Bethel was a new way of doing it. And she asked him, "Which one?" Here's what I love about Jesus' response. In verse 23 he says, "The day is coming where it won't matter where you are, but those who worship me," this is verse 24, "must do so in spirit and in truth." What's so important about Jesus' response is he did not affirm either as far as their location, their origin, as being exclusive to biblical worship but biblical worship first is one of spirit. In other words, we cannot truly honor the Lord, we cannot truly worship the Lord until we are born again and indwelt with the Holy Spirit. It cannot happen biblically. Secondly, it has to be according to truth. We'll deal with that in just a moment, the biblical standard. So what Jesus is saying from the very beginning when it comes to our public worship, it's not so much whether we're in Jerusalem or Bethel, it's not so much whether it's old or new, but is it Spirit-led and is it truth-based. In other words, you do not have to be in a formal setting or a specific setting to properly honor the Lord with proper praise and proper worship just as laid out at the end of Psalms.

So that's the style issue. Let's talk about the source of our songs. Where do we get them? Where do we find these means of public worship? Colossians 3:16. Here at the church at Colossae which, by the way, probably was the most cerebral of the churches that the Apostle Paul wrote to. In fact, if you look at the letters of the Apostle Paul just almost somewhat from a stylistic perspective, these were very intelligent individuals. They had a

philosophical base to them. They liked to think out the issues. Well, in Colossians 3:16 it says that when they sung unto themselves, they should do so by singing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. In other words, we see that the source of our public worship is not one simplistic form but actually qualified as three.

Now let me break down what those things are. When it says that we are to sing the Psalms, well, we have 150 of them, and I know congregations, I know pastors who think that it is some form of erroneous worship to sing anything but the 150 Psalms. They restrict themselves to them, the problem is that in Colossians 3 it talks about Psalms, then it talks about hymns and spiritual songs. What is a hymn? Now our definition of a hymn may not be what you think a hymn is. A hymn is a song that has a multiplicity of verses that typically communicate a very broad spectrum of theology and communication. Allow me to give you at least my favorite example because it's probably my favorite hymn because of content and I think we should sing it even in the summertime, it's "Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King." If you've ever read through the lyrics of "Hark the angels sing," it is just a series of theological treatises that communicates the totality of our biblical faith and expression, and therefore as a hymn, it is one where the verses, they begin to expand on these theological treatises toward a climax of understanding. What we often classify as a "hymn" by strict definition really is not. In fact, there is something that was introduced into our culture about 150 years ago that we call the Gospel song. Now we call them hymns.

Allow me to illustrate from just a few hours ago in this very room. "There is power in the blood, wonder working power in the blood of the Lamb." You realize by definition it's really not a hymn, it's a Gospel song because all of the verses are centered upon the cross event, and it may have verses and it may have choruses, but by strict definition it's not a hymn strictly as much as it is a song about the Gospel that just happens to have verses that go along with it. This is important to our understanding because what we know as the Gospel song which we typically would classify as a hymn, actually came out of what we know as the Second Great Awakening. Hold on to that thought until we get to the end of the message.

What about spiritual songs? What are spiritual songs? Spiritual songs are not a recitation or a singing exactly of the Psalms, they're not these hymns with multiple verses, they are simple declarations of the attributes of the truth of God and our need to worship him. Now a lot of folks would say, "Well, does that mean in today's world those are what we might call choruses?" Kinda/sorta but let me give you a biblical example. Remember when King David wins the great battles and he comes in and they begin to declare that Saul has slain his thousands but David his ten thousands, remember it said that David sang and praised God. He wasn't singing the Psalms because he hadn't written them yet, and it doesn't say he sang a hymn. You realize that as the disciples and Jesus came out of the Upper Room the night before the crucifixion, it said they left and they sang a hymn. David was just expressing himself to the Lord, speaking of his attributes and David's need for him. That, my friends, is a spiritual song. It does not have the necessity of verses that build upon each other and they are not strictly from what we know as the Psalms.

Now why is that important? Because the Bible itself tells us that there is more than one source of which we drink from the well of our worship. We do not have the privilege of saying there is only one source by which to pull from because even the Bible itself says, "Well, there's Psalms, there's hymns, and there's spiritual songs." By the way, speaking of those choruses that have gained, shall we say, contemporary fame, you may not realize that the modern-day worship chorus is actually about 200 years old. It originated in the plains revival movement of the early 1800s in the middle of what we know as America. As these great evangelists of old typically, not all the time, they were typically Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist, as they began to be the circuit riders going across, they discovered a people who came to faith in Jesus Christ and who wanted to worship – are you ready for this – but they couldn't read and they couldn't write. Have you tried to memorize a seven stanza hymn when you can't read? And so they would create choruses that could be easily memorized and repeated that were doctrinally and biblically sound.

So one of the things I want you to hear is a lot of times I think the definitions that we give for worship and the names we give it oftentimes are misnomers and sometimes they may not fit the time frame that we thought they do.

Last but not least on the parameters. What about the substance? It doesn't matter what the source is, if it's not biblical, it shouldn't be used. Period. Our reason for worshipping the Lord is to align with his word in our worship and one of the things that I do, and I know this makes me a little bit quirky but that's just who I am, it doesn't matter what the style of service, it doesn't matter the location of service, whatever song we are singing in my mind, every time we make a declaration I'm putting Scripture to what we are singing and if I can't put Scripture to what we're singing, then we've got a problem because what we discover is whether it be a chorus, whether it be a hymn, whether it be a Psalm, if it's not biblically based then it shouldn't be a part of biblical worship.

Some years ago I had the privilege of not only attending but volunteering in a Billy Graham crusade. Now this was back I say years ago when he was in his late 70s, but it was years ago, and at every one of the Billy Graham crusades, particularly in his later years, he would always have a youth night. It was a night where he encouraged all the local churches and ministries to bring students and teenagers in, and you can imagine that when it came to the music for the worship portion of the service, they did not have the multi-hundred voice choir that we typically associate with Billy Graham. Cliff Barrows was not directing us to sing. It was bands, musical groups, and even individuals that these teenagers were most familiar with.

I'll never forget we were there in Indianapolis, Indiana, and that night I was on the very back row of what was then the RCA dome and it was loud and it was proud. Now remember we just read "loud cymbals," right? Well, they took that verse literally that night and I remember that they got done and Billy Graham, late 70s, made his way to the pulpit that was there on the platform and he made an interesting statement, he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, students," he said, "I've gotten to the age where my hearing is not what it used to be." He said, "I will be honest, I didn't understand a single word that has been sung for the last hour." He said, "But I have all the lyrics printed here," and he said,

"I'm proud to say that all of them line up with Scripture." I think that's a pretty good approach to things because it didn't matter how it sounded, it mattered what was it saying and his ears were not what they used to be.

So those are the parameters. So let's talk about preferences for just a moment. This is where it's gonna get fun. Preferences in our style. Preferences in our public worship. I want you to understand, though, when it comes to preferences, a lot of times it's like going to a restaurant that you would prefer. Maybe you've had this experience before, I know I have. If you've ever taken somebody to a restaurant that you oftentimes frequent whether pre or post-covid nonetheless, and it's their very first time and you bring out the menu, what do people typically ask? "What's good here?" What do you typically say? "Everything's good but I always get the...." Are you not a creature of habit like I am? In fact, I've got restaurants in this community that I frequent often, I don't even have to order, they know what I want. But if I were to take you with me, I would tell you, "Everything's good except this is what I always get." And I think sometimes whether we mean to or not, that's how we come to our public worship. We say, "Well, I know it all can be good but this is mine." And we prefer that sandwich or we prefer that meal because that's what we prefer and we forget that there are Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and there's a variety on this menu that it may not be our preference but it's not unbiblical to order that meal, to use the analogy.

So let's talk about preferences for just a moment. Preferences are personal. Each and every one of you, everybody listening to my voice right now, if I were to give you an amateur survey of sorts with a list of a variety of music styles and said pick the one that is your personal preference, you wouldn't have to think about it. You wouldn't have to pray about it. You know what you personally prefer. You know what your personal taste it, and you might be surprised what the variety might be if we surveyed enough individuals. Here's what I've noticed about the personal aspect of our preferences in worship, that there's a big difference between our preference and objectivity.

Allow me to illustrate with some real-life examples that I have witnessed with my own eyes, or shall I say, ears. Some years ago, I was serving in a context where our worship style, for a lack of better terms, I'm just gonna use broad strokes, tended to be a little more on the contemporary style. Now don't get me wrong, the roots were in the traditional hymns of the faith but it tended to be a touch more contemporary than other places might be. Well, as you can imagine, there were individuals that were frustrated, they were upset, they were bothered for a multitude of reasons and one of the things that they communicated on a very frequent, every Sunday at least a dozen times, was that the volume was just unbearable, that their ears were hurting, their friends would not attend with them and they were thinking about leaving. It was just too loud. So we invested in decibel meters, we invested in all types of equipment, and we had readings, we could read all over the room and we communicated very clearly, "I'm sorry you feel the way you do but the volume is not as loud as you think it is."

Fast forward. We had a Christmas concert there one year where we brought an individual in to sing that, shall I say, was very traditional in his nature. He sang the Christmas carols

of old, the classics that even have kind of a secular background but nonetheless have been adopted into the season of Christmas. His average decibel reading was 10 points higher than our weekly worship service but they told us it was the best worship night ever. It wasn't really about volume, it was really about style. It really wasn't about my ears are hurting as much as it was that's not my preference.

On the other side of the equation. I was not present at the story that I'm about to share with you but a dear friend of mine was because he was actually the benefactor of it. This individual grew up in a very musical home. His family actually traveled and sang at revival and camp meetings, and his dad would lead the worship but all of his siblings would play a variety of instruments. And it just so happened that this friend of mine was a percussionist. He played the drums. In fact, he's an unusual individual, I call him the Baptist Phil Collins, he can actually lead worship from the drum set if necessary. It's just a gift that he has. He tells the story that they were at a revival meeting one night and they had set up everything and they were practicing and getting ready, and all of a sudden a woman walks in the back of the room and screams like she's having a heart attack. Everybody panics, they say, "What's happening?" She goes, "Oh, the devil's in the church! Get those drums outta here!" The devil's in the church because we had drums. You do know what a timbrel is, right? And it said to play them loud. That's what Psalm 150 says and so the problem that we really have is not objective, it's very personal.

And we all have our styles and I can prove it. Now I realize that everything is digital nowadays and we run things off our phone and such, but go back in time with me a little bit to where we actually had presets on our radios in our cars and trucks. Every one of you has a preferred style of music. If you're out in the yard working or if you're working as your occupation and you like music in the background, you don't all listen to the same style, do you, because you all have different preferences, but for some reason when we come into this context, we throw objectivity out the door and it becomes personal.

So here's the precedence: we have become a church, I use that term broadly, that at least in today's vernacular has become tradition versus contemporary. Now there's a lot of different words that we could use but let's just use some broad strokes tonight and I want to share with you that I have seen the worst come out in people when it comes to this issue. I have seen individuals that when a song is sung, that they don't like the style, they sit down and cross their arms, saying, "Uh-uh, not doing it." That's some real good worship posture right there, by the way. Please note sarcasm. I've seen individuals who were walking into what they thought was a contemporary environment, see a choir in the loft and walk out and say, "That's not what I came here for." You see, do you understand that both of those are in error because neither one of them was judging on spirit and truth, neither one of them was looking at the biblical content, it's the filter of my personal preference.

The next thing I want to address is a position. You'll notice on the outline tonight that there's no sub points here because I want to ask the question that maybe you're asking and you may not be but I'm gonna answer it anyway. Other than what I've recited from Scripture, what gives me the authority to speak on this issue? What is it in my

background that says, "You know what? We need to value what you say about this topic." Allow me to take you back some years when I was walking through my doctoral program. I had the privilege of sitting under an individual who is now deceased, a man that at least in Baptist circles was a giant among giants. His name was Dr. Roy Fish. Dr. Roy Fish is just one of those that when you say his name, anybody familiar with him just kind of goes, "Aw." He's one of those guys. I had the privilege of being in a doctoral seminar entitled "The History of Spiritual Awakenings." Can I just share with you, it may be the most fruitful education I ever received in my life. We went all the way back to the 1500s, even the precursors to what we know as the Protestant Reformation, and we looked at the great awakenings, we looked at the revival movements, and we looked at the movements, we looked at the men who led the movements, and we studied them in great detail.

Now the way that our doctoral seminars worked is that each of them was two semesters long, 32 hours in the classroom per semester, two hours for 16 weeks times two, and every week that you arrived, one of the students had prepared a paper in advance that you should have read and vetted and be prepared to discuss, and you prepared a paper once every semester. So every week you gathered, you had a 40 to typically 50 page single-space paper on one of these movements, one of these men, and then we would discuss their impact in the last 500 years.

Well, the, shall we say, selection of topics goes out in May for a course that's gonna begin in August. You give your top three desires. The list probably has probably 75 or 80 individuals, topics, scenarios, movements and such. Let me give you an example. The social impact of the Second Great Awakening. The men behind the First Great Awakening. The Log College and its impact on modern-day evangelism. I mean, I could go on and on and on and some of you are going, "The Log College, that's a whole other message for another day."

So that being said, I submitted my top three choices. We didn't email in those days because it was a long time ago but we mailed them in, and after I mailed it in, I got a phone call. Dr. Fish called me. He said, "Jeff," he said, "Um, I got your selections and I'm gonna ask you to write a paper that's not on the list." I said, "Okay, Doc, I'll do anything you want me to do. Just tell me what to do." He said, "I want you to write a paper entitled 'The History of Evangelistic Music.'" I said, "Dr. Fish, you do realize I have no musical background at all." And he said, "And that's why I want you to write it." He said, "I haven't had anybody write it in almost 10 years and you're the most qualified." I said, "How am I the most qualified?" He goes, "Have you ever stepped foot in the music building here?" I said, "No, sir." "Have you sung in a praise band lately?" "No, sir." "Have you sang in a choir lately?" "No, sir." He said, "Can you even sing in tune?" I said, "No, sir." He said, "You're perfect for it. Go for it." He said, "Jeff," he said, "I don't want your preference, I don't want what you prefer, I just want the facts."

So I did something that I had never done before, I stepped into a music library and I began to research the movements of God the last 500 years, the men that God used, and tonight I don't have a music degree, I will confess that, I don't have experience in the

expression of music other than what as a young child I was strongly encouraged to participate in, even much against my will, but I will say this, I have spent an enormous amount of time objectively and academically researching the who, the what, the why, the when, the where, and most importantly an analysis therein. So I want to share with you something tonight that you may find hard to believe just simply because you've never looked at it from this perspective. We have and by the way, I'm speaking "we" the last 500 years, precursors to the Reformation up until today, there is actually a pattern that exists not just to the music that we typically sing publicly but the means by which the styles have changed because if we go back 500 years, there is a multiplicity of styles that we have participated in. We have times where one style is more prominent than another. There are many times where people get upset about a difference in style and they have divisions and such. And so I want to share with you tonight an interesting pattern. Now it's not going to appear as a pattern when I walk through these but I promise I will reveal it to you.

The pietists. You say, "Who were the pietists?" The pietists were the precursors to Martin Luther and the Reformation. These were the first ones who began to come out of the Catholic monasteries and they began to break away from the institution that had become so corrupt in those days with indulgences and other things. They were called pietists because of their personal piety and their claim – here's what's amazing, to us it's not – a personal relationship with God. Now you do understand in the 15th century that was revolutionary, correct? Because in those days you had to go through an institution and an entity to get to God, they claimed that they had a direct line to him. Now to you and I, we think that's first grade Sunday school, right? But to them it was revolutionary. So what did they start doing? They started doing what believers naturally do as an expression of their faith, they started to sing and they started to write songs and music and here's what they did, are you ready? They took the popular tunes of their culture and they put Gospel-based, biblically-centered words to them. This is 500 years ago, not just a few decades ago. We're talking about men primarily who were just months and a few years out of a Catholic monastery where you recited the same thing over and over and over again, they took the secular tunes of their day and they just put biblical words to them.

Let's fast forward a couple of hundred years to a couple of brothers by the name of Wesley. These individuals we know as the originators of the Methodist denomination. I realize I skipped over Martin Luther and he was a hymnwriter, by the way, "A mighty fortress is our God," among many others, but I promise you don't want to be here all night. I just want to hit the highlights here. John and Charles Wesley. Something very strategic about these two brothers that we see as a pattern. John was the preacher and Charles was the musician. John wrote the words and Charles wrote the music typically because John was the theologian and Charles was the musician. Now Charles wrote many songs, in fact, he's one of the most prolific hymnwriters we've ever had but he always passed them by his brother before he would publish them. Charles Wesley gained so much fame as a writer of music that his sacred music became the popular music of his culture. In other words, the popular musicians, the secular musicians took the tunes of Charles Wesley and put non-biblical words to them. So you kind of see the same format

in reverse. The pietists took secular music and put sacred words and in John Wesley's day the world took sacred music and put secular words to it.

I didn't put it on the list on the outline but I briefly mentioned the plains revival of the early 1800s where what we know as the modern chorus came from. It wasn't an adoption of sacred or secular, it really had a style of its own. We'll hold that for just a moment.

Let's make our way to the late 19th century, one of the most prolific evangelists and ministers in the history of the world, a man by the name of D. L. Moody. D. L. Moody would have not had near the fame that he does today if it had not been for Ira Sankey. Ira Sankey was his music minister. Ira Sankey was the one who led the congregations in song and actually would go on the street corners and he would sing for people. In fact, if you look up historically – now this is just how we write history – many people have claimed that Ira Sankey was the Elvis Presley of the late 1800s. His popularity was so much when they would do these revivals, whether it be in Europe or in America, he would record on the old phonographs the music, they would sell them literally out of the back of the tent, these famous tent revivals, and in our contemporary dollars – are you ready for this – Ira Sankey sold over \$100 million worth of phonographs and sheet music out the back of the tents of D. L. Moody. You go look up the posters of the D. L. Moody crusades in Europe and in America and it'll say, "Hear Ira sing" real big, "Listen to D. L. preach" real small. Ira was the hook that brought the people to the tent so that Moody could preach the Gospel to them. He was in our vernacular, don't read too much into this, he was the rock star of his day.

And what happened? Several things. He utilized a new style. Now to some of you you're gonna think, "Well, this is just the way we've always done it before." He actually did something revolutionary, he implemented a choir. That's right, we didn't use choirs like we do today until about 150 years ago. And he began to bring a choir and they began to do choir specials. Do you know what he also utilized? The Estey organ. You say, "The Estey organ, what is that?" It was a portable organ that could be put on the front of the stage, the side of the stage, or at the back of the room. Most cathedrals in those days had a massive pipe organ in the balcony in the back but he would actually be behind an instrument leading worship as he played. Nobody had ever done that before. Nobody had used choirs. Nobody had led by way of an instrument. And guess what happened? The same thing happened that happened in Wesley's day, the secular world took Ira's music and put secular words to it.

We fast forward a few decades, one of my favorite evangelists probably because of his former career, Mr. Billy Sunday. Mr. Bill Sunday at one point was a somewhat successful professional baseball player. He had a track record of, shall we say, illicit behavior. The Lord got ahold of him. He got saved. He left baseball and became one of the most prolific evangelists in the history of the world. Here's what's interesting with his music guy. He had an individual by the name of Homer Rodeheaver and Homer was an interesting guy because he did not play the Estey organ, he did not play the piano, he played the trombone, of all things. Now you do understand that this was radical in those days, that you can lead worship with a trombone? But that was his instrument of choice, that's what he was

proficient in, and guess what Rodeheaver did? You guessed it, he took the secular music of his day and he put sacred words to it. Now hopefully you're seeing a pattern here. There's flip-flopping, right? It's not all the same and that's important in just a moment. But what did Homer Rodeheaver do? He did something that was revolutionary, not only did he use other instruments but he used special music: soloists. We'd never used soloists until 100 years ago because the thought was it's too much attention on the personality. But Homer began to equip these individuals and what we know as a solo, a duet, a quartet, in public worship really originated with Billy Sunday in the early 1900s.

Finally on our journey through history, we come across an individual that is very well-known in our culture, a guy by the name of Billy Graham. Billy Graham obviously gained fame post-World War II. Had it not been for the Madison Square Garden revival in New York and the LA tent revival, may never have attained the "notoriety" that he did. But nonetheless, not only did Billy Graham change the Gospel message as far as telecommunication with technology and radio, tv and even print media, but also in what we know as "worship styles." He utilized what we know as a CCM style or Contemporary Christian Music, which my friends, is originated in the Jesus movement.

Now some of you may be familiar with the Jesus Movement. It began in the late '60s and in the '70s, and it was a movement of God primarily among college students in very secular environments. One of the hotbeds of the Jesus movement was Hollywood, California. Now that's not a place we think of the Bible Belt, is it? But Hollywood, California had one of the greatest venues of Gospel presentation there in California because that's where it came out. It really was, and I hate to use this term but I'm going to, the Jesus movement was really hippies for Jesus, is what it was, and they had a unique style, they had a unique form, and the Jesus movement spread throughout not only the coffee shops of California and on the Eastern coast, but it primarily saw itself rooted on the college campus. The college campus, story after story after story of the Gospel going forth, lives being changed and out of the Jesus movement what we know today in the 21st century, what we would call "contemporary music" was originated in the late '60s and the '70s with the contemporary Christian movement of the Jesus movement.

So what we have today are stylistic differences that all possess unique historical origins. Now the reason I put the Jesus movement next to Billy Graham's name is that Billy Graham always had a student night but he didn't do a student revival. He would have different nights where they would, shall we say, I don't want to use the word pander but they would specialize in a style that would be apt for a genre or demographic that they wanted to attend that night. And really Billy Graham is the one who perfected this model where on one night we're gonna have a Gospel quartet singing, and on one night we're gonna have a band so loud we have to print the lyrics because we can't understand what they're saying, and they would have different nights of different styles and what Billy Graham was doing is he was recognizing that there is a division among our culture and so all I want to do is get the Gospel out and so I'm gonna utilize all of it.

Now I mentioned to you that there was a pattern and you may not have been able to see the pattern, and if you didn't see the pattern that was actually on purpose. Here is the

pattern. This is the synopsis of the research that hopefully I'm in a position to share, that 500 years of Gospel-based, biblical, public worship in the evangelical church, that our styles always changed on the backside of a major revival movement. In other words, the First Great Awakening produced Isaac Watts and the hymns of Isaac Watts. The Second Great Awakening produced the music of Ira Sankey. In other words, if you look back, we never changed styles just because we wanted to, we always changed styles because a revival movement whether it be the First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening, how about the Protestant Reformation, that was a pretty big one, all of these revival movements produced such a fervor, such a synthesis, such a – listen – a unity among the body that we did something revolutionary, we did the same thing they did in Psalm 149, what does it say? They sang a new song. They sang a new song. And so the pattern is that every time over the last 500 years that a major revival movement has taken place, the music that it has produced always sounded a little bit different than the music prior to it. Sometimes the secular became sacred, and sometimes the sacred became secular. That really was incidental but I wanted you to see that it "went both ways." What's important for you to know is that every one of our music changes was on the backside of a major revival movement where the majority not just of the culture but the church was so interested in the things of God they just wanted to honor him properly like we read in Psalm 149 and 150.

So what are the problems? Why do we have the problems that we have now today? I shared this in the paper that I presented to Dr. Fish and unfortunately it's true. What we know, and by the way, I want you to hear this is an academic statement, this is not a preference statement. I'm an equal opportunity offender. I actually like it all. I'm not a real fan of polka music but I'm sure you can worship the Lord with polka. I'm sure you can. But nonetheless, what we know as the modern contemporary Christian music movement that was birthed out of a revival, was it not? It was birthed out of the Jesus movement. It's the first time in 500 years that we've had a new style without a major revival but you do understand we had a revival, right? We had a movement. We had college campuses all over our country, we had coffee shops all over our country where these people who had lived a life in complete defiance to God were repenting and getting saved and they started writing new music. Here's the problem: the people back at the church didn't experience the same movement. The people back at the church didn't experience the same revival. You see, all the other revival movements were coast-to-coast and all denominations. Now for the very first time we had a movement, guess what, only among young people in urban environments, and the larger church body didn't experience the revival and didn't experience the movement and therefore as a whole put up the walls and said, "No, you go somewhere else, hippie." And that's exactly what happened.

So what happened? They said, "Okay, we will." And they did, and so you and I today are bearing the fruit of the first time in 500 years that we have a verified, broadly accepted genre change of worship music that did not come as the product of a major revival or spiritual awakening. It did come from one but it was localized and it was of a certain demographic. So it fits the criteria, it just wasn't as broadly scoped.

So I want to encourage you tonight as we begin to wrap up what hopefully has been something that has been fruitful and not much the opposite, I want you to turn to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, and I want to share with you all of our futures. As a believer in Jesus Christ, we will always have different preferences on a lot of different issues whether it's the food we eat at a restaurant or maybe even the songs that we "sing," but I want to take you to Revelation 5 where the 24 elders are sitting around the throne of God, the four beasts are there, it says there are people there from every tribe, every nation, every tongue. One of these days, you and I, every single one of us as a believer in Jesus Christ, we're all going to be together at Revelation 5:9. All of us, and I want you to hear what the Bible says, "And they sung a new song." Ladies and gentlemen, whatever your preference is, it's going to change when you get to heaven. Whatever your personal desire is, I promise you nobody's gonna raise their hand and say, "But, but, but, Jesus, I prefer this style." It says they sung a new song. Why is it that there's no division? Why is it that there's no discord? I can tell you why, because you know what Revelation 5 is? It's the ultimate revival. All the people of God, all experiencing the presence of the Lord, and all basking in his glory, and there's not a one of us that's gonna argue about the instrument that's used, the beat or the style that is presented because a revival took place.

This may be uncomfortable for some of our ears to hear but allow me just to state the facts. Probably the most beloved, revered and sung song of our faith today is "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." I do want to share with you something that you may not be comfortable with, Amazing Grace at one point was a contemporary song. It was new. Now it was written on the backside of the Second Great Awakening, do you see the pattern there of why it was so well received, and it was written by a slave trader. That's right. Look it up. The life of the person before Christ that wrote it was one of the most despicable occupations in the world, and when it came out there were people who rejected it because of who wrote it, and there were people that rejected it because the way it sounded. Can you imagine worship today without Amazing Grace?

You say, "Well, why is it so revered?" Because we've had revivals since then, we've had awakenings since then, and there, my friends, lies the core of the problem. We're never gonna come to an agreement on this until we have a revival. The answer is not your style versus my style, the answer is not this preference versus this, the answer is not volume. You see, the reason that I entitled tonight "Why We Can't Get Along" is because we won't get along until we have a movement of God. Why can we get along? If we have a movement of God, then we will get along on the subject matter, but until we do, there is no historical or biblical evidence for it occurring.

So ladies and gentlemen, tonight we came to study a history of and a biblical understanding of what public worship is, we need to depart today not championing what we prefer, not being even willing to consider what we don't, what we really need to do is commit ourselves that God will move in our midst and all that stuff that is preference will just work itself out.

I want to end tonight by going full circle. John 4:24, those who worship the Lord must do so in spirit and in truth. You may or may not be familiar with this but in recent days there has been a, shall I say, significant number of music personalities on all spectrums of the styles who have now "come out and claim they're not believers anymore," that they no longer believe in God, they no longer believe in the Scriptures, that that was a phase of their life that is a distant past. I wish I could say it was just a certain style but it's not, it's all kinds of styles, it's all kinds of genres. Why does that happen? Because it wasn't in spirit and in truth, that's why it happens. It wasn't rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and every great revival movement begins with people understanding their sinful condition and their need for Jesus Christ in their life.

So tonight as we prepare to depart, let me encourage you if you'd like this issue to be solved, then pray for revival. If you'd like people to be able to get along better, then pray for revival because that's the only thing historically and biblically that solves this issue. Until our worship is actually an expression of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ and not just a preference, a tradition, or something that is new, then we will never be in unity over the issue.

As we depart tonight, you may be one of those who has a follow-up question and you're concerned or maybe you just need to pray with somebody about whatever the issue is, or maybe you're that person whether here in person or on the other side of the camera that says, "You know what? I don't know if that relationship exists in my life with the Lord." Just reach out to us. There's a phone number you can call. There's a number that you can text. I know in a Covid world, we're kind of concerned about everybody kind of bunching up in groups and I understand that, and so just reach out to us. I am proud to say that we do have people who have those phones on them as we speak and they would love the opportunity to pray with you, pray for you. And personally speaking in regards to tonight or any other subject matter, feel free to reach out to me. I would love not only to discuss the matter at hand but whatever the Lord is doing in your life.

Let's pray and we'll depart.

Heavenly Father, as we absorb all of what you've give us tonight, Lord, I pray that somehow, someway, you would take away from us these traditions of men, that you would take away from us these personal preferences, and that, God, our only desire, our only desire would be to honor you, to worship you in spirit and in truth. And God, I know that this is an issue that's much bigger than even First Baptist, Opelika, or East Alabama, or the Southeast United States and, God, this is an issue that's been brewing for decades and decades and decades but, God, if it be possible, could we be Goshen? Could we be that place where there is synthesis in differences? Could we be that place where worship is spirit and in truth? And God, if it be possible, even if you don't move worldwide, could you move here so we'd have the privilege of experiencing what so many of our brothers and sisters have experienced over the years, where we come together and we declare a new song because of the work you're doing in our lives? Lord, may we depart from this place desirous to honor you in spirit and in truth. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.