

6 Learn a New Song

“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.” (Revelation 14:3)

Have you ever noticed how much God likes “new”? Page through the scriptures and new things jump off the page. He likes *new* wine (Numbers 18:12); *new* hearts (Ezekial 36:26); a *new* spirit (Ezekial 11:19); a *new* name (Isaiah 62:6); a *new* creation (2 Corinthians 5:17); a *new* command (2 John 1:5); a *new* covenant (Jeremiah 31:31); *new* wineskins (Matthew 9:17); the *New* Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12); and a *new* heaven and a *new* earth (Revelation 21:1).

It should not surprise us, then, that around the throne, as people and multitudes gather, they sing a *new* song (Revelation 14:3). Would anything else be fitting for a moment like that: People streaming in from all parts of the world and from all moments in time—people whom we have not seen for years who have had such an impact on our lives—all gathering together in praise to Father, Son and Holy Spirit! What could be more fitting than for this multitude to join in singing a new song of praise?

Do you find it hard to picture? Me too. But consider this: What is your favorite hymn or song to sing in praise of God? Even if you cannot sing, what is the song you just love to hear sung by a large group of people? Can you picture singing that song—people, lots of people around you, singing with all of their heart and soul? When I am singing a song that expresses the love and faith I have deep inside, I love to sing it out for all to hear, because I am speaking about the love and joy of my heart. Ask those around me. They will testify to my singing certain songs joyfully loud (not always on key, but joyfully loud). Now, try to imagine what it will be like to gather around the throne

and sing praises to Him with loved ones from all ages standing before Him face to face.

Look over there—there are Abraham and Sarah singing, and near them is Isaiah. Come on over here with me and let me introduce you to my dad who loved to sing when he was here on earth. What they and we all share in common is that everyone is singing a new song.

What is this new song being sung by those who have gone before us? It is part of an expanding and unending chorus that echoes throughout the pages of Revelation. It begins with the singing of “Holy, Holy, Holy” (4:8) as the Lamb of God is crowned in glory. It reaches its peak with the Hallelujah Chorus in the marriage celebration of the bride and the Lamb in 19:1-10 and continues to be sung in glory and joy even as you read these words.

The words of the new song are given in Revelation 5:9-14. There are three stanzas. The first proclaims that the Lamb is worthy to receive the scroll because with His blood He has “*purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*” (vv. 9-10). The second stanza (v. 12) expresses the praise and honor and glory that the Lamb alone is worthy to receive: “*Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.*” The third stanza gives glory both to God and the Lamb together: “*To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!*” (v. 13).

This “new song” is mentioned only twice in Revelation—once in 5:8-9, and once in 14:3. There

is, however, an interesting difference between the two verses. Take a look at them and see if you can detect the difference:

“And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy, to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation’” (Revelation 5:9-14).

“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth” (Revelation 14:3).

In the first reference, the new song is sung before the throne by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. In the glory of heaven where we know fully and no longer in part, everyone knows the words and the tune. In worship, there is nothing quite like the joy of hearing people sing when everyone knows the words and the tune and sings from the depths of their souls. That is the scene before the throne.

In the second reference, the new song is sung by the 144,000. Who is singing the new song? This represents the church on earth—those believers, you and me among them, who are awaiting the great day of the Lord’s return. What I find curious and incredibly humbling about this verse in Revelation 14:3 is the word “learn.” In heaven, before the throne, there is no learning. Everyone knows the words. No choir practice is necessary before the throne. But here on earth, not everyone knows the song. There are so many who do not know what the Lamb has done for them. So many have never even heard. Some who have heard may not yet fully understand. They have heard the Word, and yet they walk along their way downcast and depressed, much like the men on their way to Emmaus after the Resurrection.

We gather Sunday after Sunday in worship for “choir practice.” Crowds of people—believers mingled with unbelievers, and those who have so many questions and doubts—worshiping and learning a new song. This is what humbles me: Here we are in worship, learning the song that they sing before the throne in perfection and glory. Some of us may sing it off key and others may be flat, but we sing. Sometimes it is more than my singing that is flat. Sometimes it is my faith and love for Him that fall flat. Yet we sing the song that is sung in glory around the throne. We sing the new song that praises Him for what He has done and for what is yet to be revealed.

In worship we learn of His love and His saving grace over and over each Sabbath Day. In spite of our willful disobedience, we hear the words, “On the night when He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when He had given thanks He gave it to them and said ‘Take and eat, this is my body which is given for you,’ and in response we sing the new song as the words, “Holy, Holy, Holy” roll off our lips.

The liturgy within our church is structured to bring praise to Him *and* to teach us. There are such powerful and profound lessons to be learned within the liturgy and the hymns we sing. It may seem repetitive at times, but that is good. We are learning the new song, and repetition helps us to learn. Ask any choir director. You practice and you practice it over and over and over again until you know it and it becomes part of you.

God first placed the new song into my heart when I was baptized as an infant. As I grew up, my mom and dad sang the new song to me, teaching me the words as they opened His Word to me. Through devotions and our evening prayers, they taught me the new song. All of this was reinforced as they took me to Sunday School and Worship, which were a must in our home. These were a part of the “choir practice” where we were learning to sing the new song with brothers and sisters already before His throne. What I remember most is when my mom and dad would sit on the piano bench,

singing as a duet so many of the great hymns. I can still hear them singing together, “I Love To Tell The Story.”

I love singing the new song, but I am still learning it. As I grow in His Word, I am learning new stanzas in which to express the adoration and love I have for what He has done. I am still learning the width and depth and breadth to words that I have sung most of my life. Louis A. Brighton, in his wonderful commentary of Revelation, says it so well:

“There is a profound message. . . here on earth, the church learns the hymns sung by our glorified brothers and sisters in Christ. The church on earth joins the church in heaven to form *one* holy church, united in faith expressed through hymns sung in unison. In worship the church on earth raises her voice to participate in the heavenly worship. This truth is articulated in the Preface: ‘With angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying...’” (p. 369).

When I hear those words spoken, I cannot help but think of my dad and those who stand before Jesus. What they sing in joyous and endless praise, we here on earth are learning. The thought of that humbles me and fills me with great joy at the same time. It also compels me to invite more people to join the “choir”—to come and worship with me. As I share His love with those who are lost and they join me in worship, each voice adds to the growing swell of praise unto Him. It is not enough for me to learn the new song. I want to invite those whom I know to join me in the chorus now and unto eternity.

All of this is summed up so well in the song that I remember my mom and dad singing on that piano bench, “I Love To Tell The Story”:

I love to tell the story
of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory,
of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story,
because I know ‘tis true;
It satisfies my longings
as nothing else can do.
I love to tell the story,
‘twill be my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story
of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story;
‘tis pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I tell it,
more wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story,
for some have never heard
The message of salvation
from God’s own holy Word.
I love to tell the story,
‘twill by my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story
of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story,
for those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting
to hear it like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory,
I sing the new, new song.
‘Twill be the old, old story
that I have loved so long.”
I love to tell the story,
‘twill be my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story
of Jesus and His love.

(Words: A. Katherine Hankey, 1866, Music: William G. Fischer, 1869)

Prayer: You alone, O Christ, are worthy to receive glory and honor and power and wealth and all wisdom. I bow before you, O Christ, in humble and heartfelt thanks for your life that you offered up on my behalf. You endured the agony of the cross, the shame of man’s mockery and the forsakenness of your Father, so that I might be cleansed. Yours and yours alone are the Kingdom and the Power and Glory now and forevermore. **Amen.**

Challenge: The next time you are in worship, sing each of the hymns and participate in each part of the service imagining that you are standing with the company of heaven before the Throne.

Scripture Reading: Revelation 4-5

From the Book of Concord: “I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought into it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God’s Word, which is the beginning point for entering it. Before we had come into this community, we were entirely of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. The Holy Spirit will remain with the holy community or Christian people until the Last Day. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases holiness, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in its fruits, which the Spirit produces” (The Large Catechism, The Third Article of The Creed, pp. 437-438.51-53).