

David's New Song

Rick Warren's Use of Psalm 40:3 to Endorse "Rock" Worship.

And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Psalm 40:3, KJV

Saddleback Church is known as, "The flock that likes to rock!" On his *Pastors.com* website Rick Warren addresses the controversial subject of church music as he shares "three thoughts about music in worship," which are: "Music is powerful"; "You can't please everyone"; and, "It's the message, not the music." [1]

In developing his first thought, Pastor Warren employs Psalm 40:3 to be a biblical endorsement for any type of contemporary Christian music. He writes:

In Psalm 40:3 (NCV) David says, "He put a NEW song in my mouth . . . Many people will see this and worship him. Then they will trust the Lord." Notice the clear connection between music and evangelism: "Then they will trust the Lord." [2]

Warren infers that David's "**new song**" can refer to rock music and that such a contemporary and culturally relevant music possesses an ability to evangelize people's hearts in a way that traditional hymns and sermons (i.e., the preached word) cannot. But really, is that the message of Psalm 40? As opposed to singing traditional hymns, did David mean to endorse for the worship of God any "new" musical expression that our culture might invent? Among the many other styles of music in western culture, do rock, reggae, rap, or other cultural varieties equate to David's "**new song**"? Let's look at the Psalm.

Psalm 40 is divided into two parts, the first being *David's praise* for a past deliverance from a life threatening situation (vv. 1-10), and second, *his petition* for protection amidst any future trials (vv. 11-17). At the beginning of the praise section (vv. 1-3), David announces that when he was in trouble, he "waited patiently (i.e., intently) for the Lord," a wait that the Lord eventually rewarded. It's difficult to be patient amidst trials, but in the end God proved faithful to David as He will to other of His children when they find themselves in difficult circumstances. As Paul wrote,

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint (Romans 5:3-4a).

Through tribulation God builds our character and strengthens our faith.

In picturesque language, David describes how God delivered him in verses 1-3. He recounts

that *first*, the Lord “**inclined to me, and heard my cry**” (v. 1b); *second*, that the Lord, “**brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay**” (v. 2a); *third*, David announced, “**He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm**” (v. 2b); and *fourth*, he testified that the Lord “**put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God**” (v. 3a). In summary, the Lord *regarded* David’s prayer for help, *rescued* him from destruction, *repositioned* his feet upon solid ground, and *renewed* David’s spirit by putting a new song in his mouth.

It is important to note that God’s gift of song to David was in conjunction with the three other things He did to effect David’s deliverance. Psalm 40:1-3 contains this lesson: *After hearing David’s cry for help, observing his patient waiting for the Lord’s rescue, and listening to him celebrate God’s deliverance by singing a “new song,” onlookers could be led by David’s example to trust God amidst similar trials.*

But what did David mean when he stated that the Lord gave him a “**new song**”? The adjective “**new**” (Hebrew, *chadash*) can also mean “fresh.” As a verb it can mean “renewed” (1 Samuel 11:14; Psalm 51:10; 103:5). Of the song sung by David, Willem VanGemeren comments that,

[T]he song was not necessarily a new composition. The newness lies in the event of salvation history. The recent victory is one additional chapter in a long series of God’s involvements with his people. An older hymn of praise [Might we say a traditional hymn?] could well have been used . . . [3]

By his mention of the “**new song**”—we’ll call it a grace song, because God put it in David’s mouth—David meant to state that his deliverance provided him with a renewed and fresh perspective of God’s providential care for him. After a time during which his trial distracted him from singing, God rekindled David’s desire and renewed his spirit to sing and testify about the Lord’s deliverance. By mentioning God’s gifting him with a “**new song**,” David did not mean to provide a pretext by which succeeding generations of Christians might worship God with any music a worldly culture might produce. To believe that would require that acid rock, heavy metal, punk, or whatever, be accepted as God’s gift to the church.[4] Not in David’s wildest dreams should we presume that he had some of this culture’s debased music in mind when he wrote about his “**new song**.”

Rick Warren’s understanding of Psalm 40 is interpretively inaccurate, anachronically misapplied, and therefore irrelevant to the debate over which style of music Christians should employ to worship God. David’s mention of the “**new song**” that God gave him provides today’s believers with an example for singing choruses, songs, and hymns with a rekindled spirit of praise because in Christ, God has saved and delivered them.

Ironic isn’t it, that Psalm 40:3, the verse Rick Warren twists as a proof text for validating the use of rock music in the worship of a local church, more appropriately supports the singing of established hymns, only singing them with a renewed appreciation of God’s providential care for us!

ENDNOTES

[1] *Pastors.com*, Rick Warren, "Match the Music to the People You want to Reach," MinistryToolBox, Issue #190, 1/19/2005. Online at www.pastors.com/RWMT/?id=190&artid=2924&expand=1.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Italics mine, Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 5, Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991): 318.

[4] On my recently completed preaching and teaching mission under the auspices of Philip Powell and *Christian Witness Ministries* (www.cwm.org.au) in Australia and New Zealand (August 30-October 4, 2011), I noted that the music of *Hillsong*, the name of Brian Houston's Sydney congregation and his son's worship team, was categorized as "rock" by the listening offerings on *Air New Zealand* flights.

When leaving Adelaide, Australia, a city of beautiful church buildings, my driver, a former "druggie" and recent convert to the Christian faith, pointed out, as he drove me to the airport, the church building where as an unbeliever he formerly attended. The name listed on the old church building was "Heaven." He then related to me that the youthful worship in "Heaven" involved rock and trance music, dancing and drugs, something called "rave." I can only ask, is this where the "new worship," with its heavy emphasis upon the sensory and sensual impulses imbedded in carnal bodies and hearts, is headed, a worship intent upon facilitating entrance into "altered states of consciousness" where for participants a hell is synthesized into their version of "heaven"? See Revelation 21:8; **"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."**