

11/30/08

Advent in the Psalter: When God Comes

Sermon follow up

Rich Lusk

As I often do, I want to footnote my sermon for those of you are interested in sources and further study.

On the church calendar as a basic theology curriculum, I suggest Lawrence Hull Stookey's *Christ's Time with the Church*. There are many good introductions to the ecclesiastical year, but this is one of the best. It's informative and fairly easy to read, but not pedantic, like a lot of treatments of this topic. To state it again, here are a couple of summaries of the church year:

Based on the life of Christ—

Advent – the promise of Christ's coming to reign

Christmas – Christ's birth

Epiphany – Christ's revelation of himself by his words and works

Lent – Christ's suffering

Easter – Christ's resurrection

Pentecost – Christ's gift of the Spirit

Based on themes –

Advent/Christmas – God coming to reign

Epiphany – God revealing himself

Lent – God suffering with and for us

Easter – God's triumphing

Pentecost – God's mission

On music, in the sermon I borrowed *heavily* from a sermon by Tim Keller called 'Singing', preached at Redeemer PCA in Manhattan in April, 2008. Keller provided the whole singing/groaning/singing motif in redemptive-history, as well as some of the quotations I used. I highly recommend this sermon for a good, biblical-theology of music.

On idolatry, many theologians have used the ancient Greco-Roman pantheon to demonstrate that while we don't use the their names, we are captive to the same idolatrous powers. The names have changed, but the idols have not. See, e.g., Tom Wright's *Bringing the Church to the World* and David DeSilva's *Sacramental Life*.

C. S. Lewis talks about praise/thanksgiving completing enjoyment in his book *Reflections on the Psalms*. While there are some problems with this book (e.g., the way Lewis handles the imprecatory), it is also filled with many brilliant insights. Here is a portion of what I was alluding to in the sermon (from the chapter, 'A Word About Praise'):

But the most obvious fact about praise – whether of God or anything – strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honour. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless . . . shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses [e.g., Romeo praising Juliet and vice versa], readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game – praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars. . . . Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, praise almost seems to be inner health made audible. . . . I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: 'Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?' The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about. My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because *the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation*. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with

you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with. . . .

If it were possible for a created soul fully . . . to 'appreciate', that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme beatitude. . . . To see what the doctrine really means, we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God – drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable, hence hardly tolerable, bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression, our joy is no more separable from the praise in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds. The Scotch catechism says that man's chief end is 'to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.' But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.

A number of pastors and theologians have built off of Lewis' insights here, including John Piper, most notably in his now classic work, *Desiring God*. Speaking of Piper, while I heard and read of Wesley's night with death row inmates in several places, perhaps the best context to find that story is here: [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/1991/2827\\_Charles\\_Wesleys\\_Radical\\_Fruitful\\_Risk/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/1991/2827_Charles_Wesleys_Radical_Fruitful_Risk/).