

Celebrating with Songs of Hope

Dear Friend,

Are you experiencing the dark night of the soul? Does everything seem hopeless, senseless, and useless no matter how hard you try? Perhaps, like Job, you are crying out, “***Where is God my Maker, Who gives songs in the night?***” (Job 35:10). Charles Spurgeon stated, “Many a night do we have—nights of sorrow, nights of persecution, nights of doubt, nights of bewilderment, nights of anxiety, nights of oppression, nights of ignorance – nights of all kinds, which possess our spirits and terrify our souls. But blessed be God, the Christian can say, ‘***My God gives me songs in the night.***’”

It is because, “***God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son,***” that we can sing the songs of hope on the coldest, loneliest nights that life may throw at us. Not only does God proclaim, “***I have loved you with an everlasting love***” (Jeremiah 31:3) but He also demonstrated it through sending His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus, through His death on the cross, personally revealed the truth of John 15:13: “***Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.***” In Rev.1:5,6 we see Jesus described as the One, “***Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father.***”

Why is it so hard for us to receive the songs of hope in the midst of the nights of disappointment, tragedy and despair? These songs of hope are actually the proclamation of God’s love revealed through the Scripture, the millions of forms of art called creation and the presence of the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit of God, which from the beginning of time hovers over the waters of emptiness, formlessness and darkness, desires to bring forth order and light (see Gen.1:1-4) in our lives.

These songs in the night include that of the angel to the shepherds on that dark night of, “***Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.***” (Luke 2:10) This command to not fear in the midst of the darkness of uncertainty is based upon the fact that, “***He brought you and me to the banqueting house, and His banner over us is love.***” (Song of Solomon 2:4) We are told explicitly in Romans 8:37-39 that nothing can separate us from this love. “***No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***”

We all go through that dark night of the soul. At such a time it is critical that we have been trained by the light of the Scriptures to hear God’s songs of hope and love in the night. We don’t have to stay in despair!

Paul lays it out clearly in Philippians 4:4-9 when he says, ***“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”***

This is practical advice that when put into practice results in peace and songs of hope, on those lonely dark nights of the soul.

As we go forth in obedience sharing God’s songs of hope, we must not fail to see the need for justice. Developers and special interest groups are raping and robbing the land. Babies are being aborted. The poor are given legal lynching in the name of the death penalty. The oil industry has bought off the politicians. People are psychologically enslaved to believe they cannot survive unless they are on the electric grid depending on the big utility companies. The homes of the poor are being condemned and the homeless are being driven out of the downtown areas. The time has come for the prophets to arise with their songs of justice and direct actions providing hope and help in this time of darkness. ***“Rouse the war cry...prepare for battle and be shattered! Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us”*** (Isaiah 8:9,10).

The true prophets of the Living God will arise with lives entrenched in God’s word and God’s works and declare ***“Let My people go”***. As instruments of God they are concerned with social conditions and see them in the light of a spiritual crisis. They are specific and startling in their indictments.

Songs of joy, consisting of just words, are meaningless as the actual human conditions and moral issues are ignored. God responds by saying, ***“They have become a burden to me; I am weary of hearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight!”***(Isaiah 1:14-16)

Making it harder for the poor to get health care, creating laws which further victimize the most vulnerable in society, to these and other oppressive conditions the prophet Isaiah declares, ***“Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless*** (Isaiah 10:1,2).

It is not enough to sing songs of hope and live in a land that claims to be founded on equality and justice. Each follower of Christ must work to see that the poor and powerless have these rights. When people are oppressed, it is difficult for them to praise God and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

As believers it is necessary that we not only listen to the songs of love and hope that God shares with us in the darkness of life but also that we share them with others who are going through difficult times. Jesus declares, ***“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers (and sisters) of Mine, you did for Me”*** (Matt. 25:40).

Sing out my friend in word and deed the songs of hope, help and direct love that are so desperately needed in the darkness of this age in which we live. God has chosen you for this time and place in history. The songs of hope provided through the Resurrection and the direct acts of love are urgently needed at this time.

Now let us celebrate with songs of hope in word and deed, for God has reentered His creation! The Wine of the Holy Spirit has come. The world’s wine is running out. People are sick and tired of the darkness they are stumbling through. The water of life, Jesus, is creating new wine. At the wedding in Cana He does this in 6 stone water jars (representing the 6 days of creation) (John 2:1-11).

A new creation is taking place. Almost every miracle Jesus did was renewal of fallen creation – giving new wine (life) through the restoring of sight, making the lame walk, even raising the dead.

Maybe you are one of those who have spent most of your life drinking the cheap wine of a self-centered life. Now you find yourself living in darkness and hopelessness. Come now to the living waters of life, Jesus Christ, and let Him give you the new wine of His Spirit and the new life resulting from His resurrection. Discover what it means to experience God’s songs of hope in the darkness of night.

Sing out your songs of hope and direct help. God has placed you in this time and place at this historical moment. If you yourself are feeling low it is well for you to take up the double-edged sword of praise. ***“May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands”*** (Ps. 149:6). It is the Word of God, which is that double-edged sword (Heb. 4:12) and the power of singing forth the songs of praise in the darkest of circumstances that will sustain and strengthen you.

In the Scriptures you will be reminded of God’s eternal love for you. A love that will encourage you in the darkest of nights. ***“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I will remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassion’s never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness”*** (Lamentations 3:19-23).

We will truly be strengthened and cheered up as we sing, in the night of our troubles, of God’s faithfulness. There is nothing like singing to keep your spirit alive. It will also encourage others around you who would otherwise be adversely affected by your negative attitude.

Remember, as you keep your mouth full of songs, you will keep your heart full of praise. Then your mind will be filled with desires to get your hands into the actions of helping others who are going through the dark valley of trouble.

Now is the time for each of us to sing forth the songs of victory provided through our Resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. After all, ***“We are more than conquerors through Him (our Lord Jesus) who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, neither angels, nor demons, neither the present, nor the future, nor any powers, neither height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***(Romans 8:37-39)

The next time you feel hopeless and afraid, look at life from Jesus’ perspective. After all, are you not His follower? Then believe Him as He says to you, ***“Don’t be afraid; just believe”*** (Mark 5:36).

To recognize Christ’s presence and songs of hope in the middle of the storms of life is the antidote for fear. Once again He tells His disciples as they panic in the middle of the lake during a storm, ***“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid,’ Then He climbed in the boat with them, and the wind died down”*** (Mark 6:50, 51).

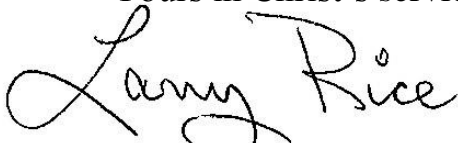
Let Jesus come into “the boat” of your life and become alive in His Word and Spirit. Such a life involves following the Living Christ and becoming His disciple in word and deed. A life of discipleship often involves hard work, frequent persecution, deprivation and even at times deep suffering. However, don’t be discouraged. Listen as Jesus tells you, ***“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest”*** (Mark 6:31).

Rest in the reality of His everlasting love for you (Jer. 31:3). ***“Bring every thought captive unto Christ”*** (2 Cor. 10:5). Ask the Holy Spirit to make Scripture come alive to you by inspiring your imagination as you read it to the point that you can visualize God speaking to you in each passage and every biblical narrative. As you do this you will begin to celebrate life with God’s songs of hope.

Now may you strive to fix your eyes on Jesus and set your mind on things that are above in order that you may break free from the pattern of this world and be transformed into the revolutionary of faith that Jesus Christ is calling you to be (Col. 3:2-3; Heb. 12:1-2).

Now my sisters and brothers, let us celebrate with songs of praise, hope and love resulting from God’s grace that has been placed in our hearts! **Let the songs of celebration come forth for there is hope for Christ is risen!**

Yours in Christ’s service,



Larry Rice