

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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WE ARE NOT "MARCHING TO ZION"

We are taught in Scripture to "teach and admonish one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16). This means if our singing teaches us anything it should be Scriptural. This fact has been neglected by the church and much of our singing has taught things contrary to the Word of God. In fact there is not much attention given to this Scriptural teaching that our songs should be an instrument of "teaching and admonishing one another" and that they serve a greater purpose than our enjoyment of lyrics and music that make us feel good. A case in point is the familiar old traditional hymn "We are marching to Zion, the beautiful city of God". The truth is Zion is said to be the city of God, but in no way are we "marching" to this city, we are already there! Hebrews 12:22: "You *have come* (past tense) to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem..."

Zion is the New Jerusalem. John "saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." The angel further said to John "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." Then, what did he show him? "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem" (Rev. 21:9,10). The city John saw is the bride of Christ, and the bride of Christ is the church (Eph. 5:25-27). As my friend, the late Curtis Dickinson wrote in his paper *The Witness*: "Although Jerusalem still occupies a prominent place in world affairs, it is no longer the Holy City of God and the Christians' real Jerusalem. Paul wrote that the Jerusalem of his day was in bondage with her children, but the 'Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother'" (Gal 4:25,26).

Zion is first mentioned in II Samuel. 5:7: "David captured the stronghold of Zion, that is the city of David." Zion was a hill located outside the city of Jerusalem and Jerusalem became known as "Zion". Zion and Jerusalem were referred to as: "the holy hill of Zion" "the hill of the Lord" "the mountain of the Lords house" and Israel was referred to as "the virgin daughter of Zion". Zion is mentioned 183 times in the Old Testament and is used 7 times in the New Testament. It is used twice at the triumphal entry (Mt. 21:5; John 12:15), twice describing Christ as the cornerstone (Rom. 9:33; I Pet. 2:6) Once declaring the Deliverer of Israel to come out of Zion (Rom. 11:26), the Lamb is seen standing on Mt. Zion (Rev. 14:1) and the fact that we "have come to Mt. Zion" (Heb. 12:22). All except the last two references are quotations from the Old Testament. Some of the history of Zion has a very important meaning for us today.

When David became king the ark of the covenant (signifying the presence and glory of God) had been missing for nearly a hundred years. The Philistines had taken it, then it sat in a farm house in Baal Judah for 20 years. The first thing David did was bring the ark back to Israel (II Samuel 6). The significant thing about this was the tabernacle, the priesthood, the sacrifices had been for generations in Gibeah (I Chron. 21:29) and they remained there until the building of Solomon's temple. When David returned the ark he did not place it in the tabernacle at

Gibeah, rather brought the ark to Zion (Jerusalem) and "set it in its place inside the tent which David had pitched for it" (II Sam. 6:17). This action by David was a drastic and unparallel break from all that had gone before. The priests, the tabernacle and sacrifices continued in Gibeah but the symbol of His Divine presence was at Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. No wonder David danced and worshipped as he did (II Sam. 6). This was symbolic of the entrance of the Lord of glory to take His place in the center of the nation. The worship that began in Zion was nothing like the worship being performed in Gibeah. In contrast with the ritual of sacrifice and priestly functions in the tabernacle at Gibeah, the hill of Zion was filled with the presence and glory of God because His presence was in their midst. The prophets summed it up in these words: "Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 12:6) and "Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph O Israel, the Lord your God is in your midst" (Zeph. 3:14,17). Then...then the temple was built and the ark was again enclosed behind the veil and seen only once a year by the high priest (II Chron. 5:2). Zion as a place, where the ark of God reflected the glory of His presence, passed away, but the experience of the ark being in David's tent on Zion was a prophecy of the day when the glory of the Lord would be revealed and men would live in that glory. Zechariah speaks of that day in these words: "In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, 'HOLY TO THE LORD' and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the bowls before the altar, and every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of host, and all who sacrifice will come and take them and boil in them" (Zech. 14:20,21). The expression "holy to the Lord" was the inscription on the miter of the High Priest, who alone could enter the Holy Place and stand in the glory of the Lord before the ark. Zechariah is saying there is a day coming when the people of God, at business, driving through the streets, cooking in the kitchen and going about their daily tasks, would be inscribed (or described) as those who live within the veil, in the very presence of the glory of God and all secular and spiritual division will be gone and all will be spiritual. So when the Hebrew writer says we "have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" he isn't speaking of something far off in the future of eternity, but the glory of God that His people know and experience now. So many churches are living in Gibeah, with the ritual and empty worship of the tabernacle and missing the opportunity of Mt. Zion and experience the presence and glory of God that is available to all.

That Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem is a present reality and not things that are ours in the distant future is seen in that fact stated in Heb.12:24 that we have come "to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel." Since it is true that we have come to Jesus it is true we have come to everything else mentioned in these verses. Myriads of angels in festive assembly are not now instruments of judgment, but are "sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14). We have come to the church of the "firstborn of all creation who is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) whose names are enrolled in heaven's book of life (Luke 10:20); to God, the judge

of all, showing He is dealing with all people, not just the Jews (Rom. 3:12-20); to the spirits of righteous men made perfect. Apart from us the saints of the Old Testament were not made perfect, because they did not receive the promises (Heb. 11:39,40). The law could make no one perfect (Heb. 10:1) but by the offering of Christ he has "perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14), but this is in the spirit and we await the perfection of the body (Rom. 8:23).

The Hebrews had to be told they had "come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." Are we any more aware of this truth than they were, and does it really make any difference? "You *have come*" means "God has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 1:3) and that "His divine power has granted to us *all things* pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (II Pet. 1:3), and "We have received the Spirit who is from God that we might know the things freely give to us by God...we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:12, 16). The problem is the religious world of today does not believe this. They have been told that all these blessings come only after we die, and we cannot realize them in the here and now. We are not "marching to Zion", we are already there and we are not going some day to "the city of God" we are now dwelling in it. Abraham looked for it; the prophets spoke of it, the Psalmist sang about it, the Hebrew writer describes it as a reality and Revelation describes it in symbols. The problem of conservative Christianity is we don't really believe we have *come* to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God. Paul makes it plain in Romans 8:23,24 that our hope is not something we realize "when I die hallelujah by and by" but our hope is that God will raise us from the dead as he raised Christ and will redeem this body along with the redemption of the earth.

David Chilton in his book *The Days of Vengeance* states it in these words when commenting on Revelation 21:9,10: "The Bride is not just *in* the City; the Bride *is* the City. John's clear identification of the City as the Bride of Christ serves another demonstration that the City of God is a present as well as future reality. We are in the New Jerusalem *now*, as the Bible categorically tells us: '*You have come* to Mount Zion and to the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...' (Heb. 12:22)." If we don't accept that we have already come to Zion, the City of God, and that the New Jerusalem is the church we miss the blessings of God in this life and fail to see what we have in Christ *now*. If the greatest blessings of God are "over there" and we must die to reap the full benefits of God's blessings then victory comes at death and ironically our enemy brings the victory and the grave becomes our idol, as the giver of life. By believing this we sing: "I won't have to worry anymore" (we do not worry here and now, or at least we are commanded in Philippians 4:6 and the sermon on the Mount to not worry); "Everybody will be happy over there" (we are to be happy, even joyful as we enjoy the blessings of God here); "O, land of rest for thee I sigh" (He is our rest now); "I've got a mansion" we are a mansion of God, His dwelling place on earth); "There will be peace in the valley for me some day" (Jesus has already given us his peace, John 14:27); "I'll fly away" (God said *stand* not *fly* away). As much as I dislike the contemporary music that has taken much of the religious community by storm, I will say that it has little to say about our rewards "over there", in contrast to most traditional hymns and songs. On the other hand I would say it has little to

do with "teaching and admonishing one another" concerning the blessings available to the believer in the here and now. These words are not meant to take away anyone's comfort or joy in singing either kind of music, rather it is to simply point out the blessings of God are not all realized after we die.

Sometimes secular writers can illustrate a modern fact that we often miss. A case in point is the poem *The Cremation Of Sam McGee* by Robert W. Service. The message of the poem is that Old Sam, who was a prospector in the North Pole thought he could never escape the cold, and get warm until after he died and was cremated. The opening verse is as follows:

"There are strange things done in the midnight sun,
By the men who toil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold;
The Northern lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was the night on the marge of Lake Labarge
I cremated Sam McGee."

Old Sam was not alone in his belief that he would have to die before he could receive the blessing he longed for. Much of the religious world has for so long been taught that all the blessings of God are "over yonder" and "in the sweet by and by" that they have missed what is ours here and now in Christ. Let me paraphrase the above lines, with apologies to Mr. Service.

"There are strange things done in the name of the Son
By the men who preach so bold;
The religious trails have their deathbed tales
That would make your blood run cold.
The religious gurus always come through
With a text for the flock to ponder,
But sometimes in the church, we are left in a lurch
Because the blessings are all over yonder."

Perhaps the text used most to say all this is I Corinthians 2:9, a very much used text at funerals: "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man all that God has prepared for those who love Him." The trouble is the next verse is seldom read in conjunction with this great promise: "for to us God revealed them through the Spirit for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." The things Isaiah was speaking of, according to Paul, have been revealed to us so we can know them *now*. He further states: "now we have received the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely give to us by God" (ver. 12).

All this is not to say all the blessings of God are in this life, rather it is to show us what we have here and now as we are "waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). The Apostle John says: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him just as he is" (I John 3:1,2). This is "the hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil" (Heb. 6:19).