

The July CFAMC Devotional Page

Ah, summertime... the season for vacations. Even though I'm probably not going to get a vacation this summer (Lord willing, I'll roll out to Nyack, NY in the fall instead), I do have some fantasy vacation spots. Like this one...

[Oliktok Point, Alaska, Spring of 1950, from NOAA and Wikimedia Commons \(Public Domain\)](#)



We all have such pictures and longings, I'm sure... and did you know that enjoyment of beautiful spots is something we have in common with our Creator, and that He Himself enjoys "vacation spots" to which He has given us -- yes, you and me, in Christ -- the privilege of inviting Him? I kid you not!

Psalm 22:3 -- But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

The NIV and the NKJV have the idea of "enthroned" upon the praises of Israel, and that gives another welcome light on this stunning little verse -- for where is God's throne, and where is His home?

Put on your thinking caps ... of course we know that we are not the ancient people of Israel, but we are still His people, in Christ. And, if you track the times when God revealed Himself in some powerful way straight through the Old and New Testaments, it was often when He was being worshipped and praised, very often in music and song. I give you first the example of the dedication of Solomon's temple:

II Chronicles 5:13-14

13. It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, "For He is good; for His mercy endureth forever," that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD;

14. So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

Israel's priests roughly correspond to our ministers of today; God moved even before they acted, in response to the people's unified praise of Him (which reminds me of what Jesse Ayers' pastor did, standing down while an apparent move of God, a strong showing of His presence, was at work in Jesse's congregation. That said, there is no telling how much preparation of God's people through solid teaching and preaching it takes from God-honoring ministers before a congregation can get on one accord to the extent seen in II Chronicles or in Jesse's congregation. Let me be careful to say that I am not deemphasizing the preeminent importance of Godly teaching and preaching -- later in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, one discovers that a time of preparation by Godly teachers and preachers was the prerequisite for such times of worship and praise to which God responded to so dramatically).

Here is a later example from II Chronicles, where God not only manifested His pleasure, but took care of some serious enemies of the children of Israel, in the time of King Jehoshaphat:

II Chronicles 20:21-22

21. And when he [that is, King Jehoshaphat] had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, "Praise the LORD; for His mercy endureth forever."

22. And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.

(Again, note, however, that there was a time of preparation; read back up into the chapter, and you'll see that Jehoshaphat declared a fast, and that all the people of Judah came together to ask the Lord's help.

Thus, King Jehoshaphat led one of the largest corporate prayers in history -- and after that, God revealed His Word, a prophecy of how He was going to reveal Himself and save His people, through a Levite, who again would correspond to a minister today. After that, that's when the singing and praising started. Again, let me be careful to say that the importance of Godly preaching and teaching should not and must not be overlooked.)

Finally, I give an example from the New Testament, an example for which every Christian born a Gentile should be especially glad (and which explicitly confirms the necessity of Godly preachers and teachers in this process):

Acts 13:1-3

1. Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen (which had been brought up by Herod the Tetrarch), and Saul [who shortly would be known as Paul].

2. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

3. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Read the rest of Acts, and you will see that the work in question was to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles -- and God marked out Paul and Barnabas during a time when His people were focused on "ministering to Him," which we may safely infer (given the pattern established in the Old Testament) included worship, praise, and probably some spirited congregational singing.

So, again, the pattern holds throughout the Old and New Testaments: when God's people get busy worshipping and praising Him, He tends to manifest Himself. But what does this have to do with Psalm 22:3, God's throne, and His "vacation spots"? I'm glad you asked that. Keep that thinking cap on!

Of course we know that God is omnipresent; He is everywhere, so there is not a spot where He does not, in fact, live. In that sense, there is nowhere for Him to "take a vacation." But consider that even though God is everywhere, there is a place where He tells us is His home: Heaven, specifically the third heaven, above the sky and the stars. Given the NIV and NKJV rendering of Psalm 22:3, in which God is "enthroned" on the praises of His people, there is another detail God gives us about Heaven that is highly interesting:

Isaiah 66:1A -- Thus saith the LORD, "The Heaven is My throne, and the Earth is My footstool."

And, just so we wouldn't miss it, the Lord Jesus references Isaiah 66:1 in the New Testament:

Matthew 5:34-35

34. But I say unto you, swear not at all, neither by Heaven, for it is God's throne:

35. Neither by Earth, for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King [He, Himself, someday].

Okay, so Heaven is both God's home and His throne -- but what makes Heaven the place God especially considers His home, when He is everywhere? Why would Heaven be the place where God chooses not just to be, but to "sit down" -- where He REALLY feels comfortable? It must be something about the atmosphere there, something about the way He is treated ... and, sure enough, we return to Isaiah and find out some things about what the seraphims (part of that general class we refer to as "angels") always are doing in Heaven:

Isaiah 6:3 -- And one cried to another, and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is filled with His glory."

The seraphim have company, as we find out way down in Revelation 4:8-11:

8. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

9. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, Who liveth for ever and ever,

10. The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

11. Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.

And in Revelation 5, all Creation gets into the act... so, Heaven is the place where God is always thanked, praised, and worshipped. I'll come back to Revelation 4:11 later, as I have a personal application I learned yesterday and just this morning to share... but let me get to my point here: God chooses to live and "sit down" where He is worshipped and praised most consistently, and that's Heaven.

But now, let it occur to you: we have the privilege of making our time together as Christians a heavenly atmosphere by sincerely thanking, worshipping, and praising the Lord -- and as we have seen in both Old and New Testaments, God "makes Himself at home" where this activity is going on!

That is, where ever you next choose to praise and worship, you can turn it into one of God's favorite "vacation spots."

Just pause and think about that for a little while. What implications does that have on how we think about "church" -- and the music we sing, play, write, and teach at church and elsewhere? Then add these facts:

Matthew 18:20 -- For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

John 14:21 -- He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him.

So, how many believers does it take in a place or circumstance to make God feel at home? How many believers, singing and making melody if only in their hearts, in any time and place, does it require? We kind of know Matthew 18:20, so "two or three" would have been a good guess. But look again at John 14:21. It takes ONE believer, praising and worshipping the Lord. Just one. Maybe today it is going to be YOU, somewhere.

Now I will give you a set of personal experiences of this last nine days, a set of experiences that come out of the fact that my church, as a couple of you already know, is in BIG trouble. I have been struggling mightily under these circumstances, as I hold the position of assistant choir director, a position with a whole lot of work and very little temporal authority. Without impugning anyone else who has to do with the church's music, it is fair to say that I wonder sometimes if I am the only person selecting, teaching, and playing music who brings to that work the kinds of thought and study that I manifest in these pages... a whole lot of departments work together on music, and a lot of people are interested more in making sure that our music touches people's emotions (Biblical accuracy optional) and keeps us in good standing when compared to the churches roundabout than they are about Bible-compliant, God-honoring content in the songs. I confess to having felt a lot of the "Elijah" complex in recent weeks, especially since our pastor, who used to select the congregational music with an eye to what he was presenting from the Word, has retired.

During this very challenging time, our own Bill Vollnger has been giving me a lot of much-needed support and encouragement. He too knows about "interesting" church incidents, and has been kind enough to share with me what the Lord is teaching him. There is also a choir director here in San Francisco, in a neighboring church, who has given me critical support -- largely by challenging me to stay focused on Who my strength comes from and how I am to react in a Godly manner to people who could make church life very miserable for me if I choose not to walk by the Spirit. Point is, I have a choice whether to focus on (idolize?) the worsening circumstances and be discouraged and defeated, or to focus on God, His glory, and His endless provision, and share in His total victory. I have a choice whether to be disobedient or obedient, in short. Every time I go into El Bethel Missionary Baptist Church -- every single time -- that is the choice before me. It is not easy, and without the power of the Holy Spirit, I would be defeated before I stepped through the doors. But He has been faithful to me, and I have been able to keep stepping through the doors though my flesh wants to run like...

Last week, God threw down the gauntlet. My choir director friend reminded me of Galatians 6:1...

Galatians 6:1 -- Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

... with an additional note about "praying for holy restoration." This caused a massive light bulb to start to power up in my head, for I will share what the Lord told me: "Stop focusing on the way other people are behaving (because your misdirection of energy is dragging YOUR OWN quality of work down, and you and I both know that if no one else does yet), and start praying for holy restoration of the choir, and of your church."

Now I am one of those people who fully believes that if you are praying for something, you need to get up from your knees with a mind of finding out where you can work out being part of God's answer. It was at about this same time that the Lord reminded me of a setting of Revelation 4:11 (which I've already quoted, but will quote again)...

Revelation 4:11 -- Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power, for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.

... that I heard maybe 20 years ago as a kid. I still don't know who wrote it, but the music has stayed with me, and when I went down to my piano, it came forth with tremendous power under my hands, in the perfect key for El Bethel's mass choir (and I have never played it before). So, I determined that I would follow the Lord's prompting and teach that to the senior choir (the biggest group of the mass choir, which will get it in the next month or so) at their next rehearsal, which took place yesterday.

But there were eight days in between Galatians 6:1 and yesterday -- I began praying last Monday, and immediately my soul was flooded with joy. Instead of feeling alone and isolated in my struggle, I felt grateful for the tremendous privilege of being called to pray for holy restoration, and humbled, because in my frustration I had missed it for so long, and would have kept missing it but for the grace of God acting through a dear friend. I determined to stay at it, no matter what.

The following day -- last Tuesday -- I had my sense amplified that God was pleased with my prayer and had heard me: the forces of darkness were apparently FURIOUS and were on the attack. Big drama broke out at El Bethel just after men's choir rehearsal -- protest, wilfulness, plans for massive insubordination -- all loudly trumpeted, agreed to by influential people, and in process when I left the building. I was stunned, but went home and kept praying for holy restoration, and thus was in a position to see something very strange and wonderful on Sunday, Monday, and yesterday...

Sunday came; nothing that had been planned by the "dramatists" came to pass. God literally snuffed it out, and made the people on opposite sides of the issue behave well together. In fact, we had one of our best worship services for a long time. This astounded me, and I would be astounded all the more because the principal actors in the drama, while we were traveling to and visiting another church, would show by their behavior that our spiritual enemies were still very busy. We're talking major BAD ACTION, folks ... the very kinds of stuff that, by human reckoning, should have happened several hours before during El Bethel's services, given what had been building since last Tuesday. But God had not permitted that in El Bethel. I knew then: God had respect to my prayer. But that was just the beginning.

Monday came ... one horrible incident with another principal "dramatist" showed that the trouble runs deeper than I knew in El Bethel. Tuesday came, and started even WORSE. I myself came under

tremendous spiritual opposition ... a sudden, profound depression tried to settle on me. But the Lord showed me what to do: before going out, I went to my piano and went through several songs of praise and worship, and sure enough, the attack ceased. But, the fight was not over ... another "dramatist" went on the attack just as soon as members of the choir showed up at the church building. I just thought, "Lord, the forces of darkness are on their job... but I know You will fight this battle, and be victorious."

Sure enough, at that point, the Lord parted the waves of evil that had been rolling through for weeks... I introduced "Thou art Worthy" to the choir, and for the first and only time in my entire career, I taught and the choir learned an entire song in the time that I have been allotted (20 minutes, some of which I had already spent on what we're doing for Sunday). We were all singing (and playing, in my case) like we had been singing the song all our lives ... and the peace, joy, and love in that room was "off the chain," as my generation sometimes likes to say. It persisted throughout rehearsal, which was one of the best I can remember. All that while the latest attack had been fended off just an hour before, with the "dramatist" literally in the next room, and after a full week of BAD ACTION by a whole lot of forces and people!

So, I came home, and was thinking about it until about 11:55 this morning, when I was writing David Canfield about needing to get this page together. While I was doing that, the Lord finally lit up that massive light bulb completely: "I will inhabit the praises of My people, and rule over (thus, protect) the place and time in which they make Me feel at home with them, no matter what the circumstances are -- and yes, I will do that even if there is just one little assistant choir director Who invites me with her praise and worship, and then does what I tell her to do so that others Who desire to praise and worship me in El Bethel can do so. You do not need more temporal power and resources, Deeann; I have supplied all that you need, for I Myself am with you, and will manifest Myself to you and those who your obedience will help to praise and worship Me."

At 11:56, I nearly broke down, and would probably have been unable to function for much of the rest of the day for the overcharge of emotion I felt. But just then I realized instead that at last I had what I needed to finish this Devotional Page, and so got busy (and now I am having trouble controlling my emotions because I realize that the Lord had me get all this together in my mind just in time to share with you -- what a privilege!).

I can tell you, therefore, from immediate experience: even if you are the only one in your circumstances who is minded to do all things to the glory of God, and who is, through your various musical pursuits, facilitating that worship and praise of God, He will indeed manifest Himself in the midst of those circumstances, sharing His pleasure and His protection with you and all those that join with you in His good time. ... when through our music, our work, and our lives we determine to make Him feel at home with our praise and worship, He will indeed let us know that He is present. Take that surety with you back to your writing desks, your occasions to share and teach the music God has given you (or allowed you to encounter) and to your churches, no matter their condition. And take it to your workplaces, and to your private worship time, wherever that may be. Psalm 22:3 is FOR REAL, y'all -- count on it!