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In Memoriam



Dr. William Stewart
1941–2003

ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ . . . ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῇ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ.
Colossians 3:3–4

Dr. William (Bill) Wayne Stewart, son of Roy and Gladys Stewart, was born June 8, 1941, in Austin, Texas, where he died on December 4, 2003. Bill graduated from the University of Texas, Texas Tech University, and the University of Southern California.

Bill had a lifetime interest in education, serving as a director at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. He was especially interested in Christian education, serving on the Board of Brentwood Christian School and as an adjunct faculty member of Austin Graduate School of Theology.

Bill is survived by his wife Becky, his son Landon and daughter-in-law, Lana, two grandsons, Christian and Casey, and his sister, Jan Colley. Bill's first wife, Daphren, died in 1986.

From 1973 Bill was a member of Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ where he taught classes and for several years faithfully composed prayers for the order of worship. He was a man of deep personal faith who was sensitive to all those around him. He viewed all life as God's gift and sought to live in a manner showing gratitude for those who have gone before and concern for those who follow.

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More Than Routine Words
A Reflection on Psalm 100

Craig Bowman

A Psalm of Thanksgiving

Raise a glad cry to Yahweh all the earth!
Worship Yahweh with joy!
Come into His presence with shouts of joy!

Know that Yahweh is God;
He made us and we are His,
His people and the flock he tends.

Enter His gates with thanksgiving,
Come into His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him,
Bless His name.

For Yahweh is good;
His loving loyalty endures forever;
His faithfulness is for all generations.

Since 9/11 I have had to deal more frequently with the failure of American popular theologies to deal adequately with human tragedy. The popularity of *The Prayer of Jabez* and *The Purpose Driven Life*, where theology has become pre-occupation with self disguised as real spirituality, leaves people panicked in the face of adversity and asking, "Why isn't God behaving the way I want him to?" It has forced me to rethink several things theologically, such as the nature of God's blessing and God's redemptive work in the face of global terrorism and war. When asked to speak about what God is doing in the world, I tend to offer answers that focus on the mystery of God's

presence with us through the suffering of Christ. Hopefully what is said today will drive you into the center of the psalms in search of an understanding of God that challenges our comfortable American life-as-usual and transcends all the political hype of this election year.

Psalm 100 calls for a joyous response to God's character and activity, but it comes in a context which is hardly joyful. Similar to Paul's admonition in Philippians to be "full of joy," the surrounding context for this hymn is the astounding truth that this God is willing to suffer completely for human sin and that this is characteristic of the king of the universe. Yahweh reigns but look carefully at what he must do and how he does it.

The appeal and the trust of those praying, in fact, depend essentially on the presupposition that God is *personally* touched by injustice, and is even called into question by it—that God must bring about justice "for the sake of God's own name." . . . Precisely because [this] God is a *living* God, those who pray seek to call their God forth from aloofness and move this God to take sides!

Only in the broader context of psalms 93–100 can the joyful response be understood fully.

Contrary to popular theology, our worship of God was never meant to lift us completely out of the mire of the world's problems and conflicts. The worship of God happens in the midst of all the chaos and pain. It is out of the depths that we cry to God and he responds. Incarnational theology did not originate with Jesus and John's declaration of it. Yahweh is frequently described in the Old Testament as One coming and One who is about to come; He is the One who is always ready to enter into the midst of the human condition in order to redeem us. Thus, Psalm 100 has a larger context that provides a breadth and depth to its joyful invitation to worship. What is that context? And how does it heighten our awareness and appreciation for what God is doing in our midst today?

Psalm 100 is "A Psalm of Thanksgiving." This is the only time in the Psalter that the word thanksgiving (Hebrew *todah*) appears in a heading.

In this case it refers more to an attitude of worship than to the sacrifice that was made. In verse 4 it is linked to the word praise. The whole psalm speaks of a shamelessly joyful response to life, which praises God for all that He has done and for all that He is. Contextually, Psalm 100 is the crescendo of praise that began building in Psalm 93, which declares that Yahweh reigns as King. Recognition of Yahweh's kingship, its complexity, completeness, and the security it affords, over the course of these eight psalms climaxes in a festal shout of praise: Yahweh is the ideal king over all people, therefore come into His presence with thanksgiving, praise, and joy. Structurally this short psalm is simple: two neatly balanced sections: (a) verses 1–2 sound the call to joyful worship, with verse 3 stating the reasons; (b) verse 4 reiterates the call to worship, with verse 5 stating the foundational motive. Yahweh is King, Creator, and Sustainer, whose goodness is marked by His *hesed* (loving loyalty) and trustworthiness, now and forever.

Psalm 100 is at the heart of Book Four of the Psalter (Psalms 90–106). This section functions as the editorial center of the psalms setting forth an answer to the woeful questions of the second part of Psalm 89, a very strong lament, which closes Book Three:

How long, O Yahweh? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? . . . Lord, where is your loving loyalty of old, which by your faithfulness you did promise to David?

The answers given in the psalm that follow are, essentially: Yahweh is king; Yahweh has been our refuge in the past, long before the monarchy existed, and will be our refuge now in exile since the monarchy is gone; blessed are those who trust in Yahweh! Over and over Yahweh is extolled as the *true* transcendent king; He is also Israel's rock and refuge, "the mighty one on high," forever. Psalm 100 exalts Yahweh, who alone is God and King. It is clear from the larger context that Yahweh brooks no rivals and that Israel is to celebrate His incomparability.

The most striking aspect of Psalm 100 is the subtle significance of its *political* imperatives in the context of faithful religious worship. Yahweh is King; Him alone shall you serve/worship. The invitation is a summons to activity whose nature and intention is the formation of a loyal congregation as the kingdom of God. We call it worship because its focus is God; but its rhetoric, movements, and response are truly political. This is a call to worship that demands that we recognize the real center of life, that we surrender our greed and self-centeredness to Yahweh who is all powerful. The royal ideology of Israel's day may not be compelling for us. But with global awareness, nations actualizing power, problematic power structures, and political struggles, we certainly know these as relevant issues. By reciting this Psalm and realizing its commands we assemble before Yahweh who is still King, Creator, and Judge; who is still our rock and refuge; who is still the great King above all gods. He is the One who invites us to sing, to praise, to fear, to rejoice, to proclaim, to lament, and to tremble before Him, the Mighty King, the lover of justice, Yahweh Our God. When we accept this invitation, we acknowledge and confess all that He is. We also accept Yahweh's definition of our identity; who He is determines who we are.

The question is whether this invitation, announced in boldness and seriousness, is heard by us. We know the words, but do we believe them when tragedy and crisis choke our faith? Are they more powerful than the God we confess to be Lord and King? Is this psalm, for us, more than routine words? Do we really "Know that Yahweh alone is God!?"

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