

Jesus And King David Sang The Blues!

(Written by David Arivett)

The old late radio Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee once published a little pamphlet entitled "The Power Of Negative Thinking"!! In it McGee made the case that the Bible is filled with negatives that lead to positive results. "Thou Shalt Not" eat of the fruit in the garden of Eden, the Ten Commandments, Jesus saying "take up your cross and deny yourself. All of these are tremendous negatives that lead to positive results! And when you examine the teachings of Jesus about 90% of his words/teachings had a negative theme...Repent of your ways (negative) and do the right thing instead (positive result). Jesus followed the same tradition as the other Hebrew prophets and the prophets spent the majority of their time pointing out what was wrong (negative).

There is so much emphasis these days on "positive" thinking that most people assume that it is the most mentally healthy and spiritual way to think. Indeed, I am fond of calling this type of positive gospel mentality being taught in churches today as "living in the realm of the spooky-natural!" Ironically in recent economic times, while the great financial institutions were going broke, they were hiring 'positive thinking' motivational speakers to spin a positive message to their employees and to the corporate world. A very deceitful but clever way to cheat others using a positive message! But I have discovered that to not voice and express your sorrows is NOT spiritual and leads to denial. So much easier just to deny the negative reality, ignore what is wrong, and speak some positive (magical) 'pseudo' spiritual words to attempt to escape whatever uncomfortable negative situation you find yourself in!

Singing the blues is indeed a true expression of the sorrow and pain we all experience. A few years back U2 Rock singer Bono wrote an introduction to the Psalms for a Publishing Company. As it turns out, Bono is a longtime fan of King David, who is credited with writing many of the songs in the book of Psalms. This is an excerpt from Bono's introduction to the Psalms, published by Grove Press. Bono recalls: "At age 12, I was a fan of David. He felt familiar, like a pop star could feel familiar. The words of the Psalms were as poetic as they were religious, and he was a star—(a dramatic character, because) before David could fulfill the prophecy and become the king of Israel, he had to take quite a beating. He was forced into exile and ended up in a cave in some no-name border town facing the collapse of his ego and abandonment by God. But this is where the soap opera got interesting. This is where David was said to have composed his first Psalm—a blues. That's what a lot of the Psalms feel like to me—the blues. Man shouting at God—"My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me?" (Psalm 22). (end quote)

That's why I love the Psalmist David and his songs...a healthy balance of positive and negative content in his songs! King David sang the blues!!! Contrary to current conventional wisdom sharing your pain and sorrows with others (considered 'whining and complaining' by a vast majority of positive thinking advocates) is therapeutic! The great Apostle/Missionary Paul advised that we should "bear one another's burdens" and in doing so we are actually fulfilling the law of Christ! Yes, it is possible to become caught up with whining and grumbling about everything and that can be unhealthy for us both mentally and spiritually, and get tiring to hear from others. But remember, sometimes just listening to another person's blues can bring about substantial healing and the blues song can end on a positive note after all! Moreover, untold multitudes have found healing in singing and hearing the blues expressed.

Noted Christian author Brian D. McLaren, in his book "Adventures In Missing The Point, shares "The Bible is full of songs that wail the blues - songs that express the agonizing distance between what we hope for and what we have, what we could be and what we are, what we believe and what we see and feel. The honesty of laments is disturbing, and they seldom end with a Hallmark cliché that fixes the pain." Brian goes on to say that "this (existential) pain needs to find its way into songs, and these songs into our churches"...doesn't our singing endlessly about celebration lose its vitality - and even its credibility - if we don't also sing about the struggle? Is it too much to ask that we be more honest about the pain, disappointment, doubt, and abandonment that is part of our lives?"

I believe that the holy, the sacred, the divine Spirit is not limited to being present only when we are singing the typical upbeat messages/songs/hymns of worship the vast majority of churches are singing on Sunday mornings. When we try to contain, control, or limit the lyrical content in songs to only express the positive experiences of humanity we only end up denying a large part of reality! On the contrary, whenever we articulate and express our pain, our longings, and our frustrations as finite human beings, we find healing! Singing the blues is also the way out of loneliness, frustration, despair, and even rage!! This is the ultimate irony of the Blues, when you sing about hard times, sad times, unfulfilled love, injustice, and even suffering, you discover singing the Blues is a cure for the Blues.

Blues music has a capacity to speak a truth across time, space, race, religion, language, and culture. The Blues are universal, and for those who will listen with an open mind and heart, the Blues have the power to disclose something important, and profound about the nature of human nature. What we have come to know as the Blues today are a uniquely African-American version of something much more ancient and primal. That something speaks to all who cry out against the world's unfairness and injustice. It speaks through all who wail, who moan, who protest, who voice their 'pain' against the world's indifference.

Throughout the gospels we can hear Jesus singing the blues! He was downright angry that the Temple (house of God) had been turned it into a 'den of thieves'. He 'sang the blues' about hypocrisy, pride, greed, and all of the negative paths that human beings were following. Jesus sang the blues that awful night in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was sorrowful and disappointed that his friends couldn't stay up and pray with him. Further, all his close friends forsook him and 'bailed' on him! Jesus even sang King David's blues song/psalm on the cross when he said " My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" At that point Jesus felt the ultimate rejection and there was no denying reality for Jesus...he and the Hebrew prophets and leaders had both positive and negative experiences in the Biblical accounts. So there is simply no need for Christians to live in denial or try to view life as only having one halve or the other. Instead we need to wail and moan as needed. Nomore feeling guilty about singing the blues - embrace both halves and let the healing begin. That indeed would be a tremendous positive!!

© 2012 Songs Of David

David Arivett is a Jazz Pianist, Composer, Arranger, Producer, and Founder of the Christian Jazz Artists Network. You can hear his music and read his articles online at:

www.songsfordavid.com