

New Year Thoughts January 2010

As we enter a new year (and a new decade), I'd like to share some thoughts which are partially in response to a 2-part vision for Christian musicians which was sent to me recently by a Musicians Network member:

I would love to see the best music-making, the best music-creating, growing out from the people of God, from our churches. Let our stories of God once again be the motivation and inspiration for great musical pieces. Music has a voice culturally. Have we, over the last century, neglected our role in producing music which directly and overtly honours and glorifies God, which tells the story of his people? Can we start imagining new Messiahs and Matthew Passions which are performable in our churches and which speak to today's harvest field? Can we produce music which the next generation will look back on and say "this generation believed in the salvation of God in Jesus Christ!"

Here is the other part of this vision:

To encourage Christians working in classical music. To spur one another on in the faith, to pray for each other, to yield ourselves to our King of love. We have a purpose as Christians working in the music industry. Let's encourage each other to yield to God's will for his kingdom to come. We can only do this together as a body of believers.

The music world is one in which we naturally form idols...composers, conductors, performers, the experience of the music... these all become idols. That's because God made music for worship. It naturally makes us worship. My vision is that we claim back music as the means to worship our one true God, that we lift up and honour his son Jesus Christ. We can model



this as believers, we can speak this out, and we can pray it into being. This is a huge spiritual battle. Satan loves it when we're isolated and discouraged, when we stop thinking big, when we settle for trying to 'get by' as a musician, when we only crave the praise of others, when we idolise other people. God would have us lift up our eyes and imagine the glory brought to his name when musicians gather and play the most excellent music from the bottom of our hearts to the praise of him who made us and loves us.

What a great vision!

In centuries past the church was the shaper of society in terms of ethics, law, morality, education, government, the arts and so on. However over the last 2-3 decades the church has largely gone 'into exile' - and rather than being in the centre shaping the way society develops, it now has little, if any, influence. I believe God wants this to change and we may well take a central role in this!

So how are we going to bring such an exciting vision into reality?

We have for too long lived in reactive mode. We need a change of gear from reactive to proactive mode. We are called to be innovators and to take risks - what we're being called to is often uncharted territory, so we can't go and find a book/manual to tell us how to do it. As Mark Stibbe says when speaking of similar ideas: "*we don't have a manual – but we have Emmanuel – God with us!*"!

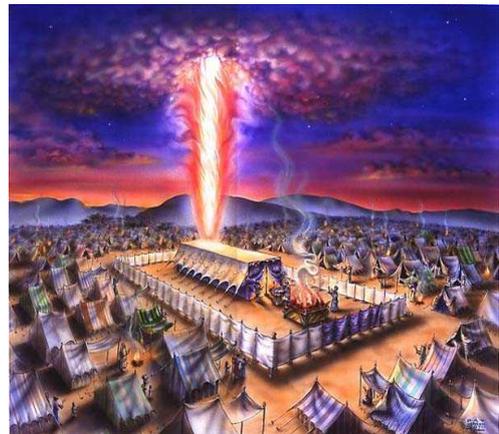
I've been excited to see a number of MN members (and some musician friends in Germany and elsewhere) involved in new initiatives over the last two years - but I'd love to see more!!

We need to be those who learn to hear the voice of the Lord and be willing to obey and to be innovators - even if it means stepping outside of our normal comfort zones.

Alex Robertson develops this further, looking at the 'Tabernacle of David' as a model for the way God is calling us as musicians filled with the Spirit of God and open to his leading and prompting:

We're not called to be a replacement for 'church' as we know it, but a different expression and place where the Lord can move in a more unrestricted way.

In Acts 15:16 the apostle James refers to a prophecy in Amos: "After this I will raise up again the tabernacle of David which is fallen". Amos' prophecy was spoken in the days when the tabernacle had long been replaced by the temple. The tabernacle was the moveable tent which was the dwelling place of God while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, living a nomadic lifestyle, flexible and shifting, always unsure when they were to move and when to settle, being led by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, constantly having to keep their eyes on the pillar (in other words, their eyes on the Lord) so that they stayed 'with the presence'.



So Amos and James both refer to a desire in God's heart to restore the tabernacle. Perhaps we can infer from this that He is talking about restoring the 'tabernacle mentality' - restoring the flexibility, the willingness to do things in new ways, to be innovative...

There is a sense in which the Lord is saying the same to us today. We too must not be hidebound by tradition, not afraid to innovate. Can we see the Lord calling us to something outside and beyond our regular church experience, something that makes us question "what is it?", something that is an epiphany, a revelation, something that enables us to have a new, fresh experience of his presence? We need to recover a flexibility and to rediscover the need to constantly keep our eyes on the Lord so that we move with His Spirit, with the pillar of cloud/fire, not afraid to uproot and stretch out into new and unfamiliar areas which may be outside our comfort zones - beyond our limitations.



In other words, we can't just do what we've always done! Many of us are being called to relinquish old ways of doing things in order that we might receive God's fresh call! As Walter Bruegemann says: *We cannot hold what we have and receive God's new gifts.*

It has been good to see a number of churches recently growing numerically and in terms of faith - many beginning to explore creative ways of reaching out to our needy society. However there is much ground to win back if we're going to take a central position again in terms of influence, and some of the old ways of doing things just won't work anymore.

This is where we as God's musicians have an important role to play. I firmly believe music and the arts will be in the forefront of a new move of God in the years ahead. God calls us to continue to develop our imaginations and to dream big dreams for Him. Dreaming produces hope and is vital when much of the church is still in exile! If we don't dream we will settle into mediocrity and eventually die from lack of vision and hope. As it says in Scripture: *Where there is no vision, the people perish (Prov 29:18)*

And hope is what so many are desperate for today. For those of us who are part of the family of God, such hope will not let us down!

Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom 5:5)

Above all, we are called to be worshippers of the true and living God - to seek His face, to *dwell in the house of the Lord (Ps 27: 4)*; to minister to Him and to wait for Him!

So let us go into this coming year determined to pursue the Lord and to be those who are willing to step out of the boat; to be innovators; to take risks both inside and outside of the church context - in order that the name and honour of the Lord will again be central in His church and our land:

Therefore since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart... (2 Cor 4:1)

-Richard Williamson