



RELEASE YOUR WORSHIP

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Do you ever get a song stuck in your head? Does it just pop up for no apparent reason, over and over again?

Sometimes its just an annoying jingle from some product advertisement—even one you don't like at all—but the song won't leave you alone.

If you ever find yourself singing along to a pop song for hours on end, you know how difficult it can be to get a catchy tune out of your head.

Alzheimer's patients who can't remember their son's or daughter's name can still belt out a Beatles' song word-for-word.

Now, psychologists have a name for why certain songs tend to stick in our heads more than others. The phenomenon is called involuntary musical imagery (INMI)—more commonly known by the creepy name of “earworms,” which is recognized as an extremely common phenomenon and an example of spontaneous cognition.

Some studies have linked this phenomenon to the size and shape of one's brain. Others identify psychological conditions, like obsessive-compulsive or neurotic tendencies. Well, the Bible says Christians are “peculiar people,” so there's that. Of course, it's far from a strictly religious phenomenon.

None of those links are identified as causative, however, nor do they suggest any form of treatment for the disturbances. Is there any help for unwanted earworms?

Some years ago, The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology published an article that suggested chewing gum, which is consistent with other studies saying that gum chewing also disrupts voluntary memory recollection. I guess it's not such a good idea to chew gum while taking a written test for your driver's license.

Anyway, next time you can't get "Call Me Maybe" out of your head, you can ponder what that may say about the shape of your brain—then grab a stick of Trident.

In my case, though, I think it's something more... You see, for the last five or six weeks, I've been waking up with a particular song running through my mind almost every morning. It's not a pop song, or an advertising ditty, but a song of praise. It pops into my head at various times during the day—day after day, and week after week. It doesn't bother me, it inspires me! I think the Holy Spirit is involved!

So this morning, we're going to think about this song and its lyrics, and explore its Biblical implications. It's called "Ancient Gates," written by Brooke Ligertwood and her husband, Scott, along with Jason Ingram.

The first two verses are these:

*There is singing at the ancient gates
There's a melody of ceaseless praise
Age to age the sound is only growing stronger*

*There's a throne beneath the Name of Names
There is seated on it One who reigns
And His Kingdom now is here and getting closer*

The "ancient gates" are those that guard the entrance to Heaven. From within them emanates a song of ceaseless praise, and with every age on earth, the number of those who sing it increases. The church that began with Jesus and twelve disciples has grown to an estimated one-third of the world's population—about 2.5 billion people!

The sound is growing stronger!

These lyrics are reminiscent of Revelation 4 and 5:

Revelation 4:2 And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. ³ The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. ⁴ Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God. ⁶ In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal. In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back.

⁸ Day after day and night after night they keep on saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come."

⁹ Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one

sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,

*Revelation 5:11 "You are worthy, O Lord our God,
to receive glory and honor and power.*

*For you created all things,
and they exist because you created what you pleased."*

¹¹ *Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. ¹² And they sang in a mighty chorus:*

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered—

to receive power and riches

and wisdom and strength

and honor and glory and blessing."

¹³ *And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea.*

They sang:

"Blessing and honor and glory and power

belong to the one sitting on the throne

and to the Lamb forever and ever."

¹⁴ *And the four living beings said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb.*

As we sang, "His Kingdom now is here and getting closer."

The Kingdom which Jesus introduced, was not unknown before His time, but it was always imagined to be a future state, having little visible influence in the present world. But Jesus framed it as "here" and "at hand" and "among you." To emphasize the "now" quality of His Kingdom, He demonstrated His divine authority by visible miracles, signs, and wonders of the Holy Spirit, and taught the people to anticipate the Kingdom's remaining presence, even after their King departed for a time.

This paradoxical timing of "here and there," or "now and not yet," frustrates materialistic thinkers, but prompts hope and faith among those who listen.

The first chorus is:

Praise Him like we're there in glory

Here and now He's just as holy

Jesus He's so worthy of it all

This echoes the "now and not yet" theme: Praise Him now as though we were already there. There in glory, standing before that great throne, participating in that energetic worship of the living beings, the elders, and the angels, along with "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea."

Jesus “was shown to be the Son of God when He was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 1:4)

He is altogether holy—now, and forevermore. And He is just as worthy of our praise today, as He will be in that great day! *Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!*

Verse three of the song anticipates some of the blessings of Heaven’s life:

*He exists in everlasting light
So on heaven's streets there is no night
Every tear is wiped away
We'll know no sorrow*

Revelation 22:5 There will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.

NO MORE death or sorrow or crying or pain! Think about that! That is the real quality of life in Christ’s Kingdom. And every taste of relief we find here and now is a foretaste of the fullness yet to come.

John 16:33 I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage—I have conquered the world.

In Him is our peace today. In our trusting relationship with Jesus. Right in the middle of the mess, the trouble, the suffering. Our peace is not to be found in the world, but in Jesus. If peace is ever to come to our circumstances, it must first come to us, through our confidence in Jesus’ love and faithfulness, and the power of the Spirit He has given us.

The final verse, then, is a call to respond to that very truth, to take the initiative to sow peace, as James wrote:

James 3:18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

Hear the lyric:

*Worship Him with joyful sound
Sing until your voice gives out
No matter where or who's around
Release your worship*

THIS is the phrase that comes to me day after day. Through it, the Spirit is calling me to action... calling US to action! *RELEASE your worship!*

Does our worship really need to be *released*? I think it is obvious.

It's not that worship cannot be expressed in calmness or silence. Surely it can, when the solemnity of our un-Christlikeness looms before us. Or, when the noise of our minds and the frenetic energy of our bodies have been spent.

But when our eyes are on Jesus, when we think of how He loves us, when we gaze at His throne of glory, when we recall the strains of Heaven's swelling chants, when we see the living beings stirred, and the elders responding, and the angels drawn into it, and the innumerable hosts of the redeemed thunder their loving appreciation—THEN we can't stay silent!

The bridge chants repeatedly:

The One who was

The One who is

The One who is to come

This is our God—the Eternal One, the Great I AM! Ever present, always loving, always in control.

We can't stay silent, and yet we do. Because that's what we do in church. We don't misbehave. We don't chat with neighbors. We don't kick the seat of the person in front of us. We don't interrupt the pastor's sermon.

I appreciate decorum as much as any, but restriction is not what church is really about. It's about release from bondage. It's about freedom. Not chaos, but genuine freedom. When it's appropriate, and you feel moved, an "Amen!" is more than okay—it's RIGHT.

When your heart leaps at a passage of Scripture, a promise from God, a whisper from the Spirit in your heart—it's right and good to exclaim, "Hallelujah!"

If you listen to the overall sound in many churches today, you might conclude that quietude is what God prefers.

But when you listen to the sounds of nature—the birds, the crickets, the breezes, the leaves on the trees, running streams of water, crashing waves of the sea, the roaring of hurricanes, the explosions of volcanoes—you've got to admit that God's orchestra is splendid, and noisy. I don't think He startles easily.

Perhaps most importantly, WE NEED to let it out. We have been made to give voice to praise. It is the confluent action of heart, mind, and body. We were made to worship!

Sure the trees clap their hands, and the mountains cry out, and the oceans roar, but only humans, made in the image of God, and redeemed by the Lamb of God, and indwelt by the Spirit of God, can praise God fully and intentionally.

It's what He's waiting for. What are we waiting for?

The second chorus urges us onward:

*Bring your song, He loves to hear it
Bring Him every prayer-soaked lyric
Jesus, He's so worthy of it all*

Does He really “love” to hear your praise? Well, this is what we find in the song of the king and his beloved:

*Song of Solomon 2:14 My dove is hiding behind the rocks,
behind an outcrop on the cliff.*

Let me see your face; let me hear your voice.

For your voice is pleasant, and your face is lovely.

*8:14 O you who stay in the gardens,
my companions are listening attentively for your voice; let me be the one to hear it!*

Why do we do it? Why do we hide our praise?

The psalmist sang:

I will bring a song of thanksgiving to you as a sacrifice. I will call on the name of the Lord. ¹⁸ I will keep my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, ⁹ in the courtyards of the Lord's house, in the middle of Jerusalem.

Hallelujah!

Praise is an offering. Sure the house of God and its ministries need financial offerings. But the house of God is first of all a “House of Sacrifice,” a “House of Prayer.” When we come together, prepare to bring an offering of praise.

Pray before you come. (Saturday night is preparation for Sunday morning. Make a place for the Lord before your weary head hits the pillow.) Pray on your way to church. Pray for the preacher. Pray for the worship team. Pray for the children. Pray for the teachers. Pray for the sick. Pray for the seekers. Pray for your own heart to be tender and attentive.

Then, pray as we sing. Let the lyrics of our songs be soaked with prayer.

Don't just be an observer; be a participant. Don't presume that others will make an offering big enough to cover for them and you. He's your God and Savior—bring Him YOUR praise!

NOW! Let's get up on our feet and sing this song to one another, and encourage the RELEASE of our worship in this house.

If you're at home today, get up from your seat and sing with us.

If you're here in the room with me, and you want to, move away from your seat and stand at the front or in the aisles, where you have space to move without bumping your neighbor. Let's sing it like we know what we're singing. Let's sing it like we mean it!