

Remembering Jesus: Soul Survivor and Sacramental Singing



We've just been to Soul Survivor. For the uninitiated, it's a Christian youth festival, held as five separate weeks in various places around the UK. We went to the last week in Shepton Mallet, Somerset together

as a family with our church youth group and with 6,500 other people.

It was fantastic. Uplifting, moving, healing, restorative, life-giving, fun, peaceful, worshipful.

But I had an initial concern that it would be all about the hype and the froth. I had had a passing observation of Soul leader, Mike Pilavachi, and he has, shall we say, a *large* personality. Would the big top and the light show make it just another spiritualised buzz for young people, to dry up like the mud in the fields as the tents are pulled down and the cars drive away?

It wasn't like that. While rightly being the centre of attention at times, Mike, when it mattered, constantly put the attention back to Jesus. He was not afraid to turn off the light show and simply ask people to pray in quietness. People weren't asked to come forward to receive ministry from the big holy guru, but to simply to pray for and care for one another.

I saw people moved with contrition, with love, with peace, with joy.

And there *was* music. Lots of it. Some loud, some repetitive, some light, some profound. It carried people away without getting carried away, if you know what I mean. And while the lyrics were not 18th Century theological treatises, they were meaningful and biblical.

It reprised me with an ongoing thought I've had about charismatic worship of this kind, the sort that's done well. What does it *do*?

Firstly, it expresses an obedience to the Scriptural injunction to build one another up with "*songs, hymns, and spiritual songs*" and to "*sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.*"

Secondly, there is a sense of expectation that this form of worship is an *effective* means of encountering the grace of God in particular, life-giving ways. This is the charismatic sense in which the worship incorporates prayer, healing, restoration, and a growing intimacy with the Holy Spirit.

These are two marks that characterise sacraments. The two canonical Sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism are done in obedience and are an effective administration of God's grace. We encounter God in the Sacraments, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

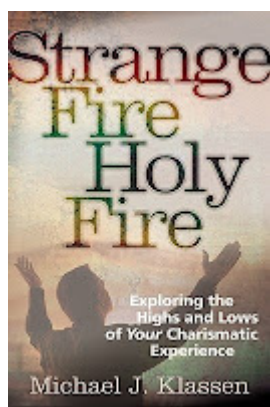
Musical worship is *not* a Sacrament, but in this sense it is *sacramental*. In the midst of musical worship we can encounter the grace of God in a particular way as the Holy Spirit ministers to us.

What struck me at Soul Survivor however, was another aspect of this. The two Sacraments also have the characteristic of being a *memorial*, in the broad sense of the word of "an aid to memory." Jesus commands that the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine and the sharing together should be done "*in remembrance of me.*"

As I watched over six thousand young people singing about Jesus it was clear, by this they were *remembering* him, and they were remembering who they are *in* him. It was truly a memorial. It was kerygmatic. It was a connection with and a proclamation of the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

And my prayer is this: that as the young people dispersed into their year, that they would take the remembering of these songs, this worship experience, with them. In whatever stresses and strains they experience, that they would be led to *remember Christ* there, away from the big top, in the midst of reality. That they would do life *in remembrance of him*, and so bear much fruit for his glory. Amen.

Review: Strange Fire, Holy Fire



I often find books that I really appreciate reading. Very rarely I read a book that I wish I had written – or one that communicates the thing that “one day I’ll write a book” about. Michael Klassen’s *Strange Fire, Holy Fire* is one of those.

My Christian background has two roots – Pentecostal/Charismatic in my teens and early twenties, and a strong reformed theological foundation after that. Oftentimes these two camps are at loggerheads and that saddens me. I have learned much from both and I have seen how a strong church and a strong spirituality is one which brings Word and Spirit together.

I believe this is similar to Klassen's framework. Like him I am both a *critic* and an *apologist* (page 12) of the charismatic movement. He does this well. This is why the book is called "Strange Fire, Holy Fire" – there is much in the charismatic movement that is strange, but there is also much that is holy. Sometimes things are both!

Klassen defines the nuances and variations within the Charismatic Movement – a useful quick insight for those who lump all "happy clappies" together and so often miss the point. He then goes through some of the key charismatic theological and cultural distinctives. Many of his conclusions I share – I was saving them up for my own book, "one day"!

With regard to tongues, for instance, he critiques the way in which tongues are made the "litmus test" (page 28) and how they are often used as a disunifying factor rather than a building-up resource (page 29). Yet he delights in the gift much like I do:

"Tongues was, and is, a very helpful gift that has enabled me to pray about situations when I didn't know what to pray. It has served as a weapon in spiritual warfare and has given me insight into God's ways. And it has definitely cultivated a deeper, more intimate walk with Christ." (page 29)

His take on theological study, and in particular, his delight in the study of church history, matches my own thoughts:

"... as we study church history, we discover that many of the challenges and false teachings we face today have appeared sporadically since the first Pentecostal movement (in Acts 2). Why repeat their mistakes and struggles when we can avoid them?" (page 53)

His consideration of charismatic "hype" and emotive manipulation is a critique I share (for instance in my

analysis of the Todd Bentley phenomenon). He paints John Wimber as a positive example:

“Then a person nearby started weeping. Then another. Then another person dropped to the ground, slain in the Spirit. By the time the meeting ended, most of the people at the front were either weeping or lying on their backs under the power of the Holy Spirit. Wimber, however, hardly said a word, and hadn’t laid a hand on anybody.

“God doesn’t need someone to whip the crowd into a frenzy in order to pour out his Spirit.” (page 57)

And he makes the point that is close to the heart of my own kerygma that “power comes through weakness (really!)” (page 59).

Klassen is honest about the seduction of power and the drives in leadership that can make it defensive or self-focussed. Here is another echo of my own experience:

“Our heavenly Father appointed Jesus – not the pastor – to be the head of the body. News flash! God never intended the life of the church to revolve around the pastor. Nor should it revolve around the body. The intended focus of the church is Jesus, its head.” (page 68)

I share his broad view on the gift of prophecy – drawing a similar line on that gift’s application and excess, it’s misuse by the overly-charismatic and its unfair dismissal by the cessationist-leaning who expect 100% accuracy from prophetic words with no provision of training or support for their prophets (page 85).

His critique of the prosperity movement (compared to deism on page 138 and superstition on page 147) is adequate. He defends experience, but does not overplay it, as an input to spiritual growth and theological understanding (page 184). And he

recognises spiritual warfare in a manner that I appreciate and understand from my own personal experience:

“On a personal level, agree to step into Christian leadership and immediately you’ll sense an invisible target on your back... Anyone who denies the reality of the demonic hasn’t read the Gospels closely enough.” (page 213)

I am with him as he shows how spiritual warfare is waged by focussing on Jesus, not the enemy. Jesus is the armour of Ephesians 6 (page 221).

While it is well-balanced, this isn’t a rigorous book. It has theological holes and the odd mis-placed anecdote or illustration. The various exegeses are adequate but not in-depth. There is still room for me to write my own book which would have a more theological flavour ☐

But I share most if not all his conclusions. I will be lending this book to some of my more “out there” friends on both sides of the spectrum so that they can understand that there is life – much life – in the centre, bridging this particular divide, worshipping our Lord in Spirit and in Truth.

