

Praise!

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Date: 24 October 2021

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[0 : 00] Okay, for a short time together, we're going to look back at SAM47, which is the third, I think, of our series in the book of SAMs.

And I'm going to start by doing something really terrible, something awful. But I think having been here for 20 years or so, I think we share enough honesty and trust together for me to be able to say this.

Because I don't say it to yourself, I say it to myself as well. The first thing is a rebuke, and I do absolutely give it to myself.

I think we value spiritual sung praise too little. I don't think we value it enough. I don't think it's important enough to us.

Because it is tremendously important biblically and to God. Melody, music, poetry and song. Absolutely captures, doesn't it, our humanity?

[0 : 57] It's our soul language. We use it in every aspect of our lives to express joy and suffering. It reflects our culture. And it also reflects, of course, the fact that we're made in God's image.

That beautiful, my favorite verse in the whole Bible is F and I, 317, that God, the Lord rejoices over us with singing. It's an amazing picture of God's character.

And heaven itself will be full of singing. Music comes from the very creative heart of God. And we see all around us its power, don't we, and its influence to move, to inspire, to unify us all together. You know, whenever you sing in a massive crowd, a great group, whether it's a concert or a sports occasion, it can be spine-tingling, can it? Just the unity that we feel with everyone else singing the same words to the same songs or when we listen to a choir.

Or when you hear a song, maybe you haven't heard for years, it can just trigger a memory, a place, a person, a time. Or you can, having not sung it for a long time, remember every single word.

[2 : 10] Isn't that ridiculous? Bob Dylan brought up an album in the 80s called Infidels and one of the songs in it was called Sweet Heart Like You. And it was playing the other day in the car.

It came on, I hadn't heard it for 20 years, and I could sing every single verse. Every word of that song hadn't been in my mind up until that point.

We see the power of it with dementia sufferers who they can remember things and they can sing things and they can recall words that are so important. It expresses our heart. I want to give an illustration of that from this week.

Adele, the singer, brought out her album, 30, and the... It's not the title track, but the single, I guess, from it is called Easy on Me.

And it's really just a story about her divorce. It's her telling her story and just... Really justifying her life decisions. It's real. For many, it's powerful.

[3 : 07] I find it hugely sad and slightly hopeless and a bit self-absorbed. But on YouTube, there's almost 100 million views of that song.

100 million views of that song. Take David Attenborough's video on YouTube about COP26, the People's Advocate.

COP26, 5,800 views. Or Greta Thunberg's blah, blah, blah speech that she made to the Youth Climate Summit on that hugely significant theme of environmental chaos.

350,000 views. Or Joe Biden's inauguration speech, 2.5 million views. But Adele's song had 100 million hits on YouTube, which says something about our world.

And it says a lot about the power of song and the power of music. And yet it's easy for us, I think, for us to underestimate that and to underestimate what we do probably sometimes in our tradition.

[4 : 15] We see it as the warm-up act to the sermon, the things we need to get through till the sermon starts. It can be heartless. It can be routine. It can be thoughtless for us.

And I'm as gilly of that as anyone else. And yet it's an integral part of our worship. It is part of the package. It's part of our obedience.

It's part of our comfort, part of our inspiration, part of what we are and who we are as we worship before God. And the Psalms, the Psalm here that's entitled, A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.

And the word there for Psalm is Mismore, which just means a poem sung to a melody, usually with instruments. And the Sons of Korah, who are mentioned here, they were professional musicians, professional songwriters.

They wrote 11 of the Psalms in this particular book too, from Psalm 41 to Psalm 72. And they were writing at the time of David being the king in Israel, kind of the high point of the Israelite relationship with God.

[5 : 22] But their Psalms seem to express many personal fears and experiences of God's people. It's heart music. There's joy. There's tears.

There's praise. And there's worship. And this Psalm, it revolves around praise. Verse 6 is really the critical verse of the Psalm.

And then four times in that short verse, we're told, it says, sing praises to God. Sing praises. Sing praises to our king. Sing praises.

And then the next verse for God is the king of all the earth. Sing praises with a Psalm. And interestingly, that second verse, now I never know why those that translate the Bible do this.

But the second Psalm, and it has got a note, it says one beside it, which says, maskill, which means it's a different word. So it's not the same word, although they're both, the introductory word, Sam, is also used, the same word is used to translate two different words.

[6 : 22] And maskill seems to just mean something like, whatever you're going to sing, sing with understanding, sing with knowledge. Sing with a truth narrative of praise.

In other words, when you're praising, you've got to have a narrative behind it. You've got to have truth behind it. You've got to know why you're singing. And I hope that that's what we'll think about a little bit. Because my second challenge, my first was that kind of guarded, guarded rebuke faced towards myself.

The second is a great challenge, isn't it? Which is just simply what is the narrative that holds your life in mind? Because that's what drives us the narrative of our life.

That's what is the lens that you look through life with? What is the motivation that drives your life? You know, as Christians, our hope and prayer is that God and God's story is the narrative behind which our life is driven.

But I think sometimes we also sideline that, don't we? But it can be lots of things, it can be just survival, it can be fear, it can be pleasure, it can be uncertainty, powerlessness, you know, in the world in which we live, you know, that narrative of fear where everything seems to be out with our control and greed is driving political decision making, the geopolitical power struggles.

[7 : 51] Lots of things, economic, environmental, may be driving the narrative behind our lives, or it may be things that are much more personal.

But I want to remind us today of the different narrative that's spoken of in the Psalms and in the Bible itself, because the Psalms are part, obviously, of God's revealed, ongoing revealed word. And we need, I think, and singing and praise is a great way of reminding ourselves that there's more than just this material world in which we live, which we sink into from day to day when we go out from here on a Monday morning, an unseen world, but real God.

And He is the narrative. And He is to be the narrative of our lives as Christians. And the challenge is, if you're not a Christian, whether you'll consider making God the narrative of your life, He's a personal, just, loving and powerful sovereign ruler.

And His Word, the Bible, progressively reveals Him as a Creator, from whom humanity that we are included in rebelled.

[9 : 00] There's a rescue that begins and is seen in the Old Testament, which anticipates a much greater New Testament rescue with the promise of the final destruction of evil in a new home for those who've trusted Jesus and have taken Him as the narrative of their life, as their Lord and God, their friend and the Savior.

And this Psalms speaks into this Old Testament context, this Old Testament rescue, where God rescued His people, the Israelites from Egypt, from slavery, brought them into their own land, made a covenant with them, lived with them, was among them in the city of Jerusalem and in the nation

with the temple at the center of that and the ark of the covenant at the center of the temple. And He was on the enthroned cherubim in the ark of the covenant. And so there's a reason for praise. And I'm going to take that truth and just apply it into our New Testament context. Because in verse 3 of this Psalm, it's a Psalm of praise, clapping hands, shouting to the loud songs of joy, verse recognition, verse 2, that the Lord the most high is to be feared, a great king over all the earth.

And then verse 7 repeats that for God is the king of the earth saying praises with a Psalm. And that Old Testament picture, the great king that's spoken of there, that would have meant a lot to people in the ancient Near East because the great king, and it's spoken of in maybe 1st, 2nd, Kings 18 about the Assyrian king, it's just the inscription of absolute great power and authority.

[10:49] I'm not sure what a modern day comparison would be to the great ancient Near Eastern kings who had absolute power and absolute authority. I'm not sure.

But the psalmist uses that to speak about who God is. He's greater and more magnificent than anything that they can imagine. He created everything.

And we are made in His image. And yet very often we ascribe glory to ourselves, to nature, to the universe, to other people.

And yet, and yet, He is the great king, the sovereign king who is before all the great nations, who has seen over the centuries the rise and fall of all the great kingdoms, whether it's Egyptian or Babylonian or Assyrian or Roman or beyond into the superpowers of today.

He's seen them rise and he's seen them fall. And all the powers and all the philosophies, he's infinitely greater and infinitely more powerful than anything that sometimes becomes the narrative of our lives.

[12:01] He's holy and perfect, creator and judge, glorious beyond comprehension. He is to be feared. That's something we struggle with.

We find it much easier to stick up our fingers at God than to fear Him, to turn our backs on God, to wrestle against God, to think He's just small and insignificant, puny, a figment of our imagination. And it's unimportant, and yet He's revealed here and throughout His work as the unseen, but yet amazingly powerful king of all the earth. And verse 8 says, He is the God who reigns over the nations who sits on His holy throne.

He's a sovereign king who's seated, and that's just speaking of His sovereign control and power over the universe with purpose and love and justice and grace.

Now that's a challenge for us. If we are thinking people at all, I think that should be a challenge for us. And it should live, it should rise within us deep questions when we see the struggles that we face, the darkness, the evil, the hatred, the brutality, when children die and are starved or are raped or are brutalized.

[13:24] We say, well, God is sovereign king. God is all powerful. Why doesn't He, why doesn't He act on these things? Why is there such darkness? And if we are living as Christians, you will have been asked that question by many who are not Christians.

And maybe as a Christian, you ask that and wrestle with it because it seems what you see and what is spoken of here in this Psalm don't match.

Now we can't trivialize these questions with easy, trite and glib answers. And we often can't give direct answers because we recognize mystery.

But what we do recognize, and I'll go on to explain a little bit, is that that is a good recognition that our world is broken. There is evil. It is serious.

It's not just outside ourselves. It's not just in society. It's not just in the world around us. It's in our own hearts. And it's something we wrestle and struggle with.

[14:24] We can ignore. We can blame God. We can reject Him. But if we do so, we need to find a narrative that will deal with these issues comprehensively and satisfactorily in our lives.

It's easy to create and to find the issues and to find the problems. But it's not so easy to provide a hopeful and meaningful answer. But we find that in the gospel.

That's why we have much reason to be singing, to praise, to be joyful and to rejoice as He says, clap your hands, all peoples, shout to God with loud shouts of joy.

Why? Because in the midst of that enthronement and power and glory, the same God descended into our chaos in love.

In verse 3 and 4 it says, He subdued peoples under us, nations under our feet. He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom He loves. And that's just speaking about God who came to redeem that Old Testament people from the slavery in Egypt.

[15:32] And that picture is a microcosm of His greater work in salvation. It's preparing us to understand His greater work in salvation and coming of Jesus.

He rescued that Old Testament people, chose them, He put them in their own land. He gave them a city that was on a hill and He dwelt with them. You know that word, tabernacled with them.

He was with them in that hill, in that temple. And He shared His glory with them, whether it was in the cloud that is spoken of, I think, I think I've maybe got a reference to that.

Yeah, in Leviticus 16 the Lord said to Moses, Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the most holy place that was in the temple, behind the curtain, in front of the atonement cover of the ark or else he would die, for I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.

So there's this Old Testament picture of the God in the holy of holies who came and lived among the people, and in the presence of this cloud as it were, and the ark of the covenant was the representation of Him being among His people in that Old Testament picture.

[16:49] But it's also a prophetic picture because it speaks about the Christ who were told came and tabernacled among us, who came and went to the atonement seat itself on the cross, who took on human flesh, who lived and spoke into this darkness, who healed, who touched, who loved, who wept, who taught, who walked into betrayal, brutality, temptation and death in order to defeat what we see.

Now evils are very real issue, and sin and brokenness and hurt and ugliness in our own hearts is a very real issue.

But God didn't stay distant from it. He didn't simply judge it, but He came to deal with it and judged it on Himself in our place, in His perfection and His glory, to offer us a way of forgiveness, belonging and hope.

That's the reason for praise. It's not easy. I don't have all the answers. None of us do have all the answers. We throw up our questions to God. Why? All the time.

Even Jesus did it on the cross. But it's a reason for praise that He doesn't stay distant and disinterested and leave us lost, but He descended in love to offer us His grace and His forgiveness.

[18:12] He also ascended in power. Do you talk about that? No, the death. The life, the death. The resurrection and the ascension of Jesus.

I was at the CU, the Edinburgh University CU on Monday night and they asked me to speak from Acts 1 to 11 and it speaks about the ascension. It really made me think about it in a way that I hadn't before.

Because in verse 5 it says that He came among them. Then He says, God has gone up with a shout, or God has ascended with a shout, the Lord with the shout of a trumpet.

Now, we know that the sons of Korah, when they're talking about that, they're thinking about maybe a picture of taking up the Ark of the Covenant, taking it up to Jerusalem and they sung and they praised and they had trumpets, or maybe talking, thinking about the cloud that represented God going up, ascending.

And that was what they were praising, recognizing this God who was powerful and yet who was among them. But there is also a greater fulfillment, isn't there?

[19:14] There's a greater fulfillment of this going up, this ascension, just as there's a greater fulfillment of this descending. Jesus said to them, it's not for you to know the times or the dates that Father has sent by His own authority, but you will receive power.

When the Holy Spirit comes in you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and all the earth. And that is speaking shortly before His ascension and then Ephesians 4 says, He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe.

Christ ascension is actually really important because it's reminding us of His enthronement having won the victory over death and evil and the grave.

I think we're so material, we're so physical, we're so immediate, we like things that we can see and touch and feel that we really struggle with the idea of the spiritual and what we can't see and what we can't feel and touch.

And yet, isn't it great that the very heart of heaven, this place we don't really understand or can't get a grasp of, is the physical resurrected ascended body Jesus Christ in human flesh, glorified certainly.

[20 : 34] But nonetheless, this representative of humanity, of you and I, is right there in the midst of heaven. There's lots of thoughts about that, isn't there? Heaven must be a place, it must be so.

But He's on the throne as the representative of saved humanity, as the God who enthroned in power over life and over death, who's defeated our death and the power of evil and will destroy it when He returns.

At the center of God's existence, this God who is Spirit, this God who is eternal and infinite is a physical resurrected Jesus with imprints of nails in His hands and in His feet.

Christ our Savior, our friend, our Lord, our God, our judge, the one who forgives us, the one who redeems us, the one who loves us. His arms remain outstretched, and Acts speaks about that and encourages us to spread that gospel to the whole world.

I'm going to come out of that. His arms remain outstretched for us as the hope, not just for ourselves, but for all the nations, that great gospel invitation.

[21 : 54] And we are called to share that love and that truth. And if you're not a Christian, you're called to repent and believe in this resurrected, ascended, glorious Savior that the Psalm in its Old Testament context, speaking about the Old Testament shadows, is pointing towards.

And He's this resurrected, ascended Savior who holds a definite future. The Prince of the People's gather as the peoples of the God of Abram, for the shield of the earth belongs to God, He is highly exalted.

And earlier it speaks about all the nations coming to Him. And that is still ultimately to be fulfilled. We had a glimpse of it today in welcoming new members from all over the world, that it's not anymore just a Middle Eastern nationalistic religion.

It never was intended to be. It was always intended to be a, we are children of Abram, and ultimately one day every eye will see Him and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, either in worship or in worship and love and salvation, or in a declaration and recognition that He alone is the way.

And their judgment is fair and just. Without His rescue, you and I have no hope beyond the pitiful few years that pass, only the reality of judgment either from God or there's nothing.

[23 : 34] That's really the only two alternatives, isn't it? So as believers, with this Old Testament truth and this Old Testament command, we have much reason to praise that God is an incredible God, that all His revelation is of compassion, of love, of justice, and of taking that difficult reality of perfect justice, which leaves us condemned and dealing with it Himself on the cross so that we might be forgiven and saved.

A love for us that will never let us go. And I think we can learn a great deal from this Psalm about the importance of just praising Him through song for who He does, for who He is, clapping trumpets, four times making music, praising God, singing praises, shouting, singing.

They are a much more expressive nation than we are. But isn't it great that we can do that and not feel, oh, that's just a bit uncomfortable.

It's this recognition that praise together is so important. It inspires, it unites, it is a public declaration, it is belonging, it is encouraging, it is encouragement, it is goosebumps, it is comfort and grief, it is praise and happiness.

We are a people of joy and our songs should reflect the narrative of our lives and as Christians the narrative of our life should be reflected in our praise and in our worship as we gather together in our public worship together as well as singing at other times in the shower or the bath or whatever else it is you sing, which is also a great thing to do.

[25 : 36] But we praise Him and glorify Him as people together and let us do that. Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity and all God's people say amen.