

The Power of Beauty Sung (Praise Night)

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[0 : 00] Let's read together from a passage that's a song, a song, a lyrics from the Old Testament, from Psalm 27. So it's printed there in your bulletin, and we'll reflect on it for just a moment, just a few minutes.

Just the first four verses we're going to read. So the whole psalm you'll see printed, but just look with me at the first four verses, and this is God's Word. The Lord, David writes, is my light and my salvation.

Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. One thing have I asked of the Lord that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple.

This is God's holy word. Just a few minutes to reflect on this passage together. In verse 1 to 3 there, David, who wrote this psalm, he is afraid.

[1 : 19] He's very fearful. We don't know all the circumstances going on in his life that brought him to such fear. But he's very afraid. He says things like, Though an army encamp against me, I shall not fear.

So here he's talking to himself and trying to tell himself, Put away fearfulness. Don't be so afraid. And what's happening here is we're watching, we're listening to David write a song, lyrics, about his battle with anxiety.

So later, we didn't read this far, but in verse 10 he says, For my mother, my father and my mother have forsaken me. And there's a way of translating that in Hebrew from the Hebrew to English that could say, If even my father and mother forsake me.

So it could be that David is actually experiencing something like his own mom and dad rejecting him as king. But it also could be that David is thinking about all the ways life could go bad.

All the worst case scenarios. And so he's afraid in his circumstances, but he is growing in fearfulness and anxiety in this moment. But we are fearful people as well.

[2 : 25] We are very anxious people. We live in a generation that is the most anxious society that many sociologists say has ever been. And we live in a world, as we sang in Amazing Grace, of danger, toil, and snare.

There's lots of reasons to be afraid in this life. Lots of reasons to feel anxiety. The snowball effect of always imagining worst case scenarios that may be coming into your life.

And letting that become a state of fearfulness that's ruling your soul. And here I just want to point you to two things David does to fight fear.

To fight anxiety that can overtake your life. And maybe that's where you are right now. And one of the things he does, and this is why I chose this, is he makes music. He sings.

He writes lyrics. This is a song. He's writing lyrics here. He's writing this out as both a song and a prayer. He's making music to God here. It's really well known if you know the Bible at all.

[3 : 25] David loves music. He sings a lot. He got in trouble for dancing one time even. He loves to make music. He loves to play instruments. He loves to write lyrics that we, in God's providence, sing today by the power of the Holy Spirit as God's word.

And I just wonder, like him, if you find that in times of fearfulness, anxiety, stress, depression, maybe in times where you're struggling to even feel any emotions in your life at all, that it's music, singing, that often is the thing you need to come to, to break through the heart and to bring you back into a state of peace and calm and hope in the midst of fearfulness in your life.

And that's not emotionalism. That's biblical. That's what we see all across the Bible, that we need singing. We need to sing. And singing is one of the gifts God has given us to help us so much, to bring the truths that we read about in the Bible down from the head into our hearts.

And so singing gets God's goodness. It gets hope. It gets the love of God from a little spot in your memory, in your mind of what you've read on a page down into your soul. We need singing.

And so that's one of the reasons we can come tonight and sing lots more than usual, and it's really good. Music is God's gift to us. Now, if you're here tonight exploring Christianity, I think we all have a sense of this, how much music can affect us.

[4 : 52] Kurt Vonnegut was a very famous author, U.S. author. He wrote a very famous book, a very controversial book, called The Slaughterhouse Five. And Kurt Vonnegut was also, for many years, the president of the American Humanist Association.

So that's an association of humanism. Atheism is another word for humanism. So he was a very committed materialist, very committed to the idea that the belief, I would suggest, that God doesn't exist.

And yet, biographers of him talk about the fact that in people that knew him, in the quiet moments of his life, he would say to people that he, throughout his whole life, even as the president of the American Humanist Society, was, quote, Christ-haunted, is how he put it.

That he could never quite get away from the idea that he wondered in his heart if he did, in fact, believe in God. And twice in some of his published writings, he wrote phrases like this.

Let me give you just one. He said, Music is, to me, proof of the existence of God. It is so extraordinarily full of life. And in the tough times of my life, I can listen to music, and it has made such a difference to me.

[6 : 11] He was haunted by belief in God, he said. And it was music. Now, there's not a person in here, I think, who doesn't know the experience of what music can do to your soul, life.

You don't ever teach children. You don't teach children to dance in the kitchen when the tunes are playing. You know, it's just not. We know how much. It's such a gift to us. It affects us so much.

There's a black spiritual in the U.S. that has lyrics like this. Over my head, I hear music in the air. There must be a God somewhere. And so my invitation to you tonight is to do what David did, to sing to God more and more in your life.

And even if you're not a Christian tonight, I would invite you to do that too. Try going out this week and singing. Singing to God and thinking, where did music come from? And so here's my second invitation here.

Because you wouldn't like it if I took the next half hour to explain this or to talk about this. But I want you to invite you to go and look at a full-orbed argument for God's existence from the reality of music.

[7 : 19] This is very well developed and it's out there and it's all over the place. And Google it and you'll find good literature. But if you're a Christian or you're not tonight, can I invite you to go from here and to look at a full-orbed argument for the existence of God from music.

Now secondly and finally, what does David do here? The reason... How does David fight his fears and anxieties? He sings, secondly. The second thing is in verse 4.

And the reason that David sings, he knows that singing, the beauty of music, can help bring the truths of God's hope and God's security. The fact that God holds him down into his heart in a time of fearfulness and anxiety.

He knows that. But what he realizes in verse 4, what he writes in verse 4, is that he realizes that the beauty of music, the beauty of music from our wonderful musicians tonight, is just a faint echo, a dim participation in the beauty of God himself.

And so you see what he says in verse 4? He realizes that the greatest need he has in verse 4, one thing I ask for, one thing that I pray, and I hope this will be your prayer tonight, one thing I will seek is that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all my days, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

[8 : 38] So the greatest music you ever hear, the greatest art you ever see, all that is true and good and beautiful in this world, is just a faint and dim echo participating in the reality of the beauty of the Lord himself.

He gives this gift to us. But it points to a much more beautiful one, God himself. True beauty. So older theologians talk about the beauty of the Lord.

David says it right here. What do they mean by that? They mean something that's very hard for us as humans to even talk about. It's something like this. It's the fittingness of God.

People have said that. What do they mean by that? They mean that, what is beauty? Beauty is when something is exactly as it should be. There it's beautiful. It's good. It's true. It's exactly as it should be.

God is so beautiful because he is exactly as he should be. And there's a lot of ugly in our lives. There's a lot of ugly in this life we live. But God is the one who is truly beautiful.

[9 : 34] Exactly who he should be. Never changing. And David knows here that what he needs the most and what music points him to is a need deep down in his soul. And I wonder, no matter what you believe in tonight, if you felt this, a need deep down in your soul to hear the beautiful voice of God and to see the beauty of God's face.

It's why J.R.R. Tolkien, when he was writing his stories about Middle Earth in the Chronicles of Narnia, in The Lord of the Rings. We'll come to Narnia in a moment.

The Lord of the Rings, when he was writing his story, when he talked about God's creation story in the Silmarillion, that famous book, God created Middle Earth howl by song, the beauty of his voice.

He sang it into being. He thought it's the only way. When God speaks, it is music. It's the greatest song you've never heard. Right? And then in The Chronicles of Narnia, C.S. Lewis copied him a little bit.

And Aslan sings Narnia into being. Aslan, this metaphor in the story of God himself. And it says in The Magician's Nephew, when that happens, it says that the children, when they heard Aslan singing, it was the greatest sound that they had ever heard.

[10 : 47] We all, we all actually, when we participate in music and enjoy beautiful music, we're actually realizing that we were made to hear God's voice and to see the beauty of God's face.

And so what I want to, let me give you one more invitation as I close tonight. Can I invite you, no matter if you've been a Christian for 50 years or more, or you're exploring Christianity right now, can I invite you to do this?

Go and explore the Christian message, the shock, the scandal of the Christian message. Because this is the Christian message. The beautiful Lord, the maker of all beauty.

He made himself known in Jesus Christ. The Son of God became human. He, the maker of all beauty.

He, the beautiful one. When he came to this earth, he came poor. He came despised. He came lowly. He came as a person that was not visibly beautiful.

[11 : 45] And at the climax of his life, he went to a very ugly cross and bore our very ugly sin. The beautiful one himself, the Lord, the maker of all beauty, the giver of all good music.

He experienced something so ugly in our place so that we might taste true beauty one day. That we might hear his voice so that we might see his beautiful face. That's the scandal of the gospel.

Let me invite you to investigate that. Number one, go out and explore the argument for God's existence from beauty. Number two, let that direct you to the scandal of the gospel.

And know that in the scandal of the gospel, for every single one of us tonight, the Lord Jesus longs for you to come to him so that he may sing a new song over you. He wants to sing over you.