

Sing!

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, everyone. We're gonna be focusing tonight on a theme, and the theme has come from a series that we're doing in worship, the whole idea of worship, different elements, that we've been going through in the evenings.

I haven't been here for all of them. Maybe you haven't either. But tonight, we're gonna focus on an integral aspect of worship, and that is singing. So we've been doing some singing, and we're gonna do some more singing.

We often do singing when we come to church, don't we? But that's the theme that we're gonna pick out tonight, particularly from two passages that we've read, Sam 96, and from that passage in Ephesians also.

So I want to do that. I want to use those two passages. I hope that's not confusing, using two different passages. Just to pick out two different elements of what it means to sing, and why we sing. So that's basically what we're gonna do just now, for a little while.

But just to start, think of this for a minute. So if you drive, which I guess many of us here do, have you ever had that situation where you started out on a journey, so you're gonna drive, what, 20 miles somewhere, and you've driven 10 miles, and you suddenly have a kind of realization where you think, I can't remember getting here.

[1 : 24] I've got here. I must have turned left and right, and then left again at some point. But I can't remember it. The other daughters are just me. But I've spoken to a number of people who've said the same thing, so it's not just me, I know.

But there's that moment of realization where you think, I've been on complete automatic pilot for the last 10 miles. And pretty dangerous, trying to do. But that applies at different levels and at different times in our lives, doesn't it?

Think about this for a minute. Have you ever come into a church service, you've got halfway through this service, and you think, I've got no idea what just happened for the last half an hour. Somebody was to say to me, what did you sing 10 minutes ago? I can't remember. What did you read? I can't remember. He just been on automatic pilot. Now, I've done that so I can say this example.

And I think many of us have. We get to a certain point, for a whole range of different reasons, and we realize we've simply been going through the motions. So that happens with reading, it happens with praying, it happens with singing.

[2 : 31] It happens for different reasons. It might happen because you've got really, really awful things on your mind, and it's really difficult to stay focused. It might happen because you don't care. It might happen, and maybe particularly in our, or certain cultures, we think singing is not quite so important, we just want to get that done, and then we can get to the sermon. So whatever, there's a whole bunch of different reasons why that might be the case.

When we think biblically, when we look at what the Bible says about worship and about singing, we are called to raise our view of singing as an integral aspect of what it means to worship God.

And what I want to do tonight is show how that's the case at a big level, a macro level if you like, and at a small level, a very interpersonal level. So that's really the way that I want us to be thinking tonight.

The Bible encourages you and me to value so dearly the privilege that you and I have to sing, praise the God.

It's a core element of what you were made to be. So we'll see that hopefully as we go through. So first of all, we're going to start in Psalm 96. And like I said, I want just to bring out this first point of the bigness of singing.

[3 : 57] And what I mean by that, we see very immediately when we get into the first couple of verses, if you have a Bible, look at it for a minute with me. We get this image of there being almost this kind of universal and eternal song of praise to God, which is His right.

It is correct and proper, a kind of big universal level that this continuous, huge, great and glorious sound of praise is going on from all peoples and all things towards God, because He is God and He is the Creator.

And He is worthy of this great expression of praise. Sing a new song to the Lord, sing to the Lord all the earth. Every single thing in the earth should give praise in song to God, because He's worth it. He's the Lord. He's the Creator. Sing to the Lord, bless His name, tell of His salvation, and it goes on, reinforces this point, so that we're in no doubt about what should be happening.

Sam's exists for many purposes, but a core element of the purpose of a Sam is to allow you and I to have our focus clear.

[5 : 25] You and I exist as fallible and as needy and as broken and as sinful people, created by a great God, and what we need most desperately at the center of who we are is to be reoriented so we see Him in all of His glory, so that we're able to come to a point where we see appropriately the need to repent, to recognize Him as our Creator, to bow the knee before Him, what we be so humble as to do that, and to praise Him for His goodness.

But we get this sense that everything should praise Him. So sing to the Lord all the earth, but it goes on, and if I can just skip towards the end of the Sam, and I'm sure to go down to the verse from verse 11, you get this kind of, the Sam returns to its original theme of the fact that everything should resound in noise to the greatness of God.

And so it says, let the heavens be glad in the earth rejoice, let the sea roar, and all that fills it, let the field exult, and everything in it then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

The Sam's are poetic, beautiful, they use language like this, imagery. But there's this kind of great sense that almost everything in creation in some way should resound to this great universal, eternal, appropriate song of praise to the Creator.

And this is mentioned different times throughout the Bible. Job, let me just go very briefly to Job in this wonderful speech at the end of Job where God answers Job and calls him to account and reveals to him something of His majesty and of His glory.

[7 : 17] And he says, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined this measurements? Who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk?

Or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? A wonderful description, that image of creation singing this great song of praise to God. Language helps us have a sense of the appropriateness of praising God. And then again just in a verse, I think I said Derek used a couple of weeks ago when he was preaching again on the same kind of theme at the end of Isaiah chapter 55.

You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing. All creation rises to rejoice when we recognize who God is and His glory and His majesty and His salvation work that He has done for you and for me.

So it's entirely appropriate to think of singing praise to God. Not as just some random thing that we do when we come to church. Not as something that we do when we feel like it, but as this thing that exists from all time and will exist for all eternity.

[8 : 44] Absolutely right that God has praise sung to Him for who He is and for what He has done. So this Psalm just kind of asks us to lift our thinking, lift our eyes up to recognize this.

So that we see that when you and I join together in St. Columba's here tonight or when you go home to your home church or wherever you are, where you sing praise in a congregational setting, we're not just doing some isolated random thing that we've kind of dreamed up by ourselves. It's this great appropriate expression of praise that we're called to do as a part of what God should receive in praise towards Him.

So there's this kind of macro level if you like this big picture. One commentator speaking about this, Sam, describes the sort of sense of excitement that exists here to praise God.

So he says there's an air of almost irrepressible excitement at God's coming. It's as if there's a... everything that is in the Psalm is just bursting forth with praise to God, including singing.

[9 : 58] And that's key, isn't it, as well? We're not talking here, when I talk about some sort of universal song, I'm not talking about some sort of Disney Lion King kind of song to the earth or something. Because the whole point of that kind of thing is it's all wrapped up in itself, celebrating itself, where the universe celebrates itself.

This Psalm directs us at all times and anybody in the Psalm who is singing praise is doing so to God. We look outside of ourselves and all our needs and all our problems and all that we have to the one who is the Creator, the great Creator, sustainer, Savior of the whole world and that's very clear in the Psalm, isn't it?

So verse 3, declare his glory among the nations, for great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. That is the theme, one of the core themes of the Psalms, great is the Lord, the Lord reigns.

The Lord reigns and we have to see that. That's what we need to have our, if you like, our vision lifted up to remember that or to be convinced of that, maybe for the first time.

The Lord reigns. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. So that's the first thing, just to see that when we sing, we're joining our voices to this great song.

[11 : 23] If I can put it like that, for one of a better way of expressing it. But just pause there for a minute, because when we talk like this, it really begs the question, doesn't it?

And that question is, do we, do you, join in song, this great song of praise to God? Now, I don't just mean do you stand with the rest of the congregation and say the words, speak the words as they come up on the screen.

I mean, can you say, because I don't know, I don't know you, can you say, do you know that you are part of this song, that when you stand, you worship the Lord and you do that by singing to him? Because at a base level, this is a heart issue. This is about each individual recognizing the greatness of God, that he is the creator and he is the one who is also the saviour.

And because of that, our response is to praise, or not. We've been reading a little bit about how this kind of sense of how everything should give praise to God.

[12 : 29] But you know, don't you, that there is a group, there is a category of person in the universe that don't and that won't.

And if you think about those demons who will never give praise to God, and they are against God, Satan's angels, and they won't give praise to God now, and they never will.

So we have to ask ourselves the question, if we're not praising God now, if it's not been the case that our heart has been changed and we've recognized him as the creator and the saviour, and the one to whom praise should be given, at what point will you start to give him praise?

At what point will you recognize him as the one to whom praise should be given? Because there will come a day, there will be a time when you will no longer have the opportunity to do that.

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine a time coming when you will no longer have the opportunity to give praise to him? And so it's a very serious thing to think about, what is this thing that we do when we give praise to God?

[13 : 40] When we join our hearts together in song. It's not like a kind of stylistic lifestyle choice. And if it is, we're on pretty dangerous ground. What we're doing here is we're talking about giving the due honor to the creator of the world.

And that's a personal thing that you need to consider. So that when you stand to sing tonight, next week, whenever it is, is this a song of praise that comes from your heart because you've been changed by God?

And you've come to know him as the one who causes you to sing however well or badly you sing. Do you sing from your heart? So there's this big picture level, if you like.

And in a minute, I want to come on to the second passage that we looked at, this passage in Ephesians, to look at the very, if you like, the micro level, the very interpersonal level. But first, just to take a bit of a step back and just to think a little bit more about singing as if you like a thing.

So we've been talking about singing. It's a part of what we do. It's familiar. We've been trying to sort of show how it's this great, amazing thing that we should be so inspired to do. But why singing?

[14 : 58] We could just speak, after all. We could just say things. And we do. We read from the Word. We speak the Gospel to one another. But why singing? Why is that something that we're to do? Why are we so encouraged to sing?

Why is it an integral part of Christian worship? Singing's an integral part of human experience, isn't it? Really, when we think about it. We're singing it in all kinds of situations.

I'm not a huge Nina Simone fan. I don't know very much about her. I like some of her songs. She has a song that I just came into my head a little while ago and I remember it. And I only really remember a line or two. But she sings, I sing just to know that I'm alive.

Now, for years, I thought she was singing. I sing just because I'm alive. And that kind of made sense to me. That sounds like the kind of lyrics somebody was singing, with a happy with the world and life and everything's great. Life is wonderful. Things are great.

I sing because I'm alive. Kind of feels like Disney again, doesn't it? But she doesn't. She sings, I sing just to know that I'm alive. In other words, I'm kind of interpreting Nina Simone's song here, so forgive me.

[16:11] As she sings in all kinds of different experiences, she knows something of what it means to be a human. Expressing something of the joys and the sorrows, the ups and downs, the horror and the joy of human existence.

It comes naturally so very often to put things to song. But a little bit more about that. What it does when we sing, and we just sort of zoom in a little bit on what actually happens when we sing, when we sing, we take what is internal and personal, and we make it external. We take something that exists from within ourselves, specifically the joy that you know, the deep lying joy of being saved by a gracious God.

You take that thing that is from within inside of yourself, and you put it out there, you tell of it, you proclaim some of the other words that are used in the Psalm here. So that's one aspect of why we sing, because we gather together in a night like tonight, and what have we done? We've mixed our voices, proclaiming the name of God, lifting up his name.

So it goes from the internal to the external. It's also, and this is linked, but it's the personal to the corporate. So it's an individual personal issue for you that you need to deal with yourself and God. But there is, and I'm going to come on to this a bit more soon, there is a very important collective congregational sense to singing, isn't there? What happens when, whatever, 100 people stand together and sing the name of God?

[17:47] The final thing is, it goes, and it combines this crucial element of humanity, the rational, if you like, and the beautiful.

Let me just say that about singing, it combines the sense of knowing, the sense of believing, of trusting, of hearing, of following Jesus Christ, and of being able to put our voices together and proclaim his worthiness, and express our love for him as a gathered group of people who know his goodness.

It goes from that it combines the rational and the beautiful, and that is a very distinctly human gift, something that you have been given, an ability that you are able to do as you worship the Lord throughout your days.

And it's something, just in following on from that, that God does. So if you can, you may know this verse in Zephaniah, it talks about how the Lord saves his people, and it says that he rejoices over them with singing.

Isn't that an absolutely remarkable verse? That God delights to save those who will be his people, who he calls to be his people. He doesn't do it because he kind of grudgingly says, okay, I guess so.

[19:08] He saves them because of his great love, and he delights over them over you with singing. So he does this act, he calls you to himself, he redeems you because of the blood of Jesus Christ shed for your sins, and in doing that, as he sees you trusting in him and following him, sometimes falteringly with all the ups and downs of life, he rejoices over you with singing because he has made your salvation sure, and he knows that one day he will take you to be with himself where he is, where you will sing his praises forevermore.

God delights in that truth. And he has given you and me the ability to sing back to him in response to that truth.

But this is what we do when we sing. We say, Lord, your salvation is so good, I want to sing, even if I can't sing. So that's a little bit about singing and a little bit about why we sing.

We sing as well, and I'm not really going to go into this. We sing in a particular context and culture. Again, maybe this is for another time. Big emphasis for us is the congregational aspect, isn't it?

We start with that essential element that we start with congregational singing. But just before we move to the Ephesians passage, we also sing sacrificially.

[20 : 39] One of the real problems for us is if we come to church. And maybe we've zoned out of the service or the singing, because it's not how we like it, or we think it's being done badly, or we think, ah, I could have led that song better, or played the piano better, or a person next to me is not singing very well.

Whatever it is, ah, we sang the song a couple of weeks ago. We sing sacrificially, because we sing together as the body of Christ. We sing to Him to praise His name, not to just please our own whims or whatever it is we feel like should be happening.

And so there is an essential element of sacrifice where we don't make it all about us and our preferences. And so at one level, every single service that we encounter, there will be something about the element that in terms of flavor or taste or whatever, wouldn't be the way that we do it. But we come together and we join our hearts and our voices and song of praise to Him. So what that means is that the focus always needs to be on Him, always.

Or we lose the focus. And that means that we lose the heart of the singing that we're engaged in.

Okay, so a little bit about singing there. We saw that singing was something at this great level, if you like this macro level, this great song of praise to God that exists throughout all the ages.

[21 : 58] Well, I want just now, if you can just turn with me to Ephesians, we're going to finish by just thinking about it on a very different level. And that's at the micro level, the interpersonal level.

Because what we read in Ephesians chapter 5 from verse 15 is of an integral element of discipleship, which is where Christians live and walk and talk and sing together as they encourage one another throughout their lives.

Now, if you notice, when Neil was praying, he used that phrase one another a number of times. It's really important, isn't it? It's so very important because we don't just exist as people in isolation who gather together in a crowd, who raise this great song of praise to God and then kind of forget about each other.

We exist to give praise to God and to declare His glory. And we, one another. We impact one another. We encourage one another. We bless one another when we sing.

So the congregational aspect, the communal aspect of what we do when we sing is so very important. So just to come back to this little passage, don't be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.

[23 : 19] Don't get drunk with wine for that's debauchery. But be filled with the Spirit addressing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your voice.

Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. So these two things are going on at the same time, aren't they? But as we sing as a part of worship, we join our voices with this great song of praise that is entirely appropriate to God and we are enabled to be an encouragement and a blessing to one another, to speak the truth and to sing the truth to one another, to remind one another again and again of the Gospel and all that the Lord God has done for us.

So there's this interpersonal, integral level that goes on here. Now I don't imagine for a minute that you're going to walk home with your pal tonight and serenade him or her with a song. That would be unusual. Your friend would feel unusual.

So we have to, again I spoke very briefly about culture and context, didn't I? We have to kind of work out how exactly this happens. But what it means is that you may be visiting today, you may be from a church of very few people, you may be a part of a house group, you may be a part of a youth group.

It is as appropriate to sing in different circumstances as it is in the gathered congregation here because as we sing we proclaim the glory of the Lord and the greatness of the Gospel to one another.

[24 : 47] That's the great encouragement that we have. There's a dynamic thing that is being spoken of here, addressing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. So what that means is, for me and for you, when we get to that point where we've completely zoned out in worship, in singing, we're not encouraging a brother or sister.

It does matter. It does have an effect on the congregation, as it does have an effect in terms of the praise that is due to God.

So there is this great encouragement here, as well as thinking about the way that we give praise to God, the way that you encourage, bless and build up one another as you sing.

And again, I wanted to say that this is a part of an ordinary level of life. Some remarkable examples of this in the New Testament, aren't there? We think about the way in which Jesus, when he was with his disciples, as he was about to go to the cross, as they took the Last Supper together, there's almost like a throwaway verse.

It speaks about how after they had eaten the Supper, after they sang together, they sang a Psalm together, they made their way out. It was a part of what they did, these men, as they sat together, they ate together, they sang together, and then they went out to do what they had to do.

[26 : 17] And then there's the example of Paul and Silas. Remember when they were imprisoned? Terrible situation. It just goes to show that this applies at times of great joy and at times of great danger, sadness, peril, whatever it is.

They sang, they were singing hymns, and it talks about how the other prisoners were listening to them as they were singing hymns. They were giving testimony to their Lord Jesus as they languished in a jail, pretty dreadful circumstance for them to be in.

In that particular situation, they encouraged one another with their singing. They bore testimony to their Lord and Savior Jesus, and they witnessed as other people heard them while they sang.

So it kind of gives food for thought, doesn't it? Again, how exactly we apply that? But the fact is that at this great level and at this everyday, ordinary level, we encourage one another with what we say and in the way that we sing.

And of course, the final thing, just to finish with here, is that this is very difficult for us, and so that's why it's so crucial to come back to something I believe was addressed in a previous sermon again.

[27 : 29] And that is that this is, and for you, this is entirely dependent on the Spirit being at work in you. This is where you and I need that sense of preparation for worship, but we need to be in step with the Spirit because it speaks here about how this is something that is almost supernatural.

So the context here is of being counter-cultural. It says, don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. If you get drunk with wine, so loads of people get tanked up with wine and sing any kind of song, that's easy.

But it's saying, forget about that. It's not going to do you any good. Be filled with the Spirit because when you're filled with the Spirit, and don't think about this in some kind of off-the-wall kind of way, this is about the Holy Spirit of God indwelling you as He has promised to do and speaking to you, teaching you and leading you in the ways of your Savior Jesus but as you see Him as your great Redeemer and Savior, you are enabled to and prepared to sing praise to His name.

Give thanks for Him for all that He has done. Sing amongst the congregation, even sing in your small group. So again, this is about preparation. This is about asking Him to be with us in all aspects of our lives so that in this particular facet of worship, when we sing, we wouldn't just be critical of others, we wouldn't be bored, we wouldn't give up because we don't like the tune or whatever it is.

We would be prepared to focus our eyes on Him and all that He has done for us and as the Spirit enables us, we join our hearts and sing words of praise to Him and all that He has done for us.

[29 : 14] Okay, I'm going to leave it there, I'm just going to pray and then we'll finish. Father, we recognize something of your glory and of your beauty and of your greatness.

We thank you so much for the Gospel. But so often it's the case when we think about worship generally and when we consider this aspect of singing, it can be so difficult for us to see your greatness and your glory and to respond to you in the appropriate way.

And so we ask that you would enable us, that you would tune our hearts to sing your grace and your praise, that we would love to sing of your praise because we are aware more and more of all that you've done for us.

And we pray that our singing would be testimony, would be a witness to so many others who come in here to church or whatever it is that they hear us singing, would be testimony to all that you have done for us.

Thank you for the gift that you've given us where we can join together and recognize as a body your grace. Help us to enjoy this.

[30 : 38] Help us to love singing praise to you as we look forward to an eternity of singing your praise. In Jesus' name, amen.