

Sweet Praise

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] We've sung quite a bit tonight because the theme of our sermon tonight is The Lord is My Strength and My Song, which Lewis read for us.

Thank you Lewis for leading the first part of the service for us tonight. And we do know that song is always really important for us.

I think both sometimes joyfully we sing, but also I think sometimes when we're sad we sing as well. And singing has that great significance for us in both these emotional states for us.

It's a place where we learn a lot. It's a great place to memorise truth, which is why so much of the Bible's in poetic form for us so we can memorise it.

There are many memorable events in my life I remember or are triggered by song. I think of one funeral that I did.

[1 : 03] Some of my memories are sad ones, but there's also happy ones you'll be glad to know. A member doing a funeral of a young... I actually didn't do the funeral. I was a ten-year-old, a young lad who had been killed in a car crash near the area where I was the minister.

And it was a huge funeral and there was lots and lots of teenagers, there were lots and lots of young people because he was in school. And it was very moving, very emotional service.

But we sung hymns and the minister spoke. But right at the end they sang...

Well, they didn't sing, they played a pop song just as the family were leaving. And it was that song which all the young people knew really well.

That was the one that completely set them off emotionally and where they all broke down. They kind of held it together up to that point, but it was the song that they associated with it they knew about.

[2 : 04] It wasn't a hymn, it wasn't a... Because very few of them were kids who went to church. So it was... But the song was tremendously powerful. We'd see it at weddings, there's anthems that we'll sing at dances, at gatherings, singing so important.

There's one song for me particularly, now you'll be delighted to know this song that is powerful to me is a Dolly Parton song. Okay, just... And it's called In the Sweet, By and By.

But every time I hear it and there's a beautiful version of that song with an Irish gallic singer who sings a verse of it in Gallic. And every time I hear that song, I think of my dad because it was being played just when my dad died and there's that whole theme of very kind of meeting on that golden shore.

And that... Every time you hear that song, it brings back these emotions because song is so tremendously powerful and it comes from music, comes from God, praise comes from God. I think we sometimes underplay that aspect and importance of it.

Song is the language... In many ways, the language of heaven. The angels, we've seen that, haven't we? The angels sing in Isaiah 6. The seraphim are singing around the throne of God.

[3 : 19] They're praising God. Creation itself, in that beautiful poetic language of Psalm 96, we're seeing the trees sing for joy and they clap their hands.

And this great picture of creation singing, the beautiful songs of birds that we hear around us. It is just so much from the heart of God. Remember, someone preached here not long ago.

Well, so we've got to go. It might even be Corey preaching about creation, that God sung creation into... Was that right? Was that you, Corey? I think it was, yeah.

And there's that whole emphasis of music and praise. And here we come to the end of a section with regard to the first 12 chapters of Isaiah as one section and it finishes with a song.

It finishes with praise. And it's been quite hard, hasn't it? The first 12 chapters has been one or two highlights, but there's been a lot of judgment. There's been a lot of heaviness. There's been quite a

lot of darkness as God speaks about how His own people have rejected Him and turned their backs and they will be found wanting because of that.

[4 : 28] And even the enemies of God who He uses, the Assyrians, for example, will come under God's judgment. But here we find at the end of that a song of hope, great song of hope.

And I've heard someone describe it like it's a warm, sunny day at the end of a week of thunderstorms. And that's kind of what we've got, a break in the message that God is bringing. And it's a beautiful song that we're going to just think about for a few minutes, not for long this evening. But it's a tremendously encouraging song, the theme of which continues to be our song as believers and continues to be the theme of our praise as we worship God.

Because really what we have here is, it's a song that becomes progressive through Scripture. As Scripture is unfolded, we find the song becomes more and more clear and unfolded as we see God at work among His people.

The unfolding truth of Scripture brings the same message of hope through the song. We're told that, I will say, you will say, in that day I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for although you were angry with me, you're anger turned away that you might comfort me.

[5 : 56] And it speaks about this day, in that day. The day in the Bible is not just used as a 24-hour period, but it's used as an event, an event in God's revelation when God comes and God speaks to His people.

Usually in the context of rescue and salvation, when God comes, it even hints towards, this may not be speaking about the day of the Lord specifically, but it does hint towards this whole recognition of a day when God acts powerfully and God intervenes among His people, where the day of the Lord is often a day of judgment and cataclysm and sacrifice and salvation.

It all kind of comes together in a melting pot of God acting on behalf of His people as it unfolds a day of rescue and a day of salvation.

And it takes... a song takes the concept of a memorable day, and we all need memorable days and we all have memorable days. And it takes that concept and it applies it to the sovereign work of God, both in our lives but also through redemptive history, which is tremendously important.

We all have days that we look back to. I hope we all have days that we look forward to as well. And we think of that. And this song is reminding us of a day that's very important for every believer, a day of rescue and salvation.

[7 : 32] And it's progressive in the sense that we see it... We see the thread of this song right through Scripture. So you've got... And they're all related to God's work and God's rescue.

You've got the song of Moses, which is very similar to the song, at least in some of the other theme, and in Deuteronomy 32 we have that song of Moses.

In fact, if you flick back to the last chapter and verse 16, we're reminded of the rescue that Moses sung the song about, there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

And that rescue for God's people was praised and was sung about by Moses in his great song. And then we have this song here, which is prophetic of another rescue that will happen.

Because you remember, up to this point, God is speaking about the fact that the people of God who have turned their backs on them will be taken out of the promised land and will be taken into captivity in Babylon.

[8 : 45] A remnant will return from Babylon and will return to Jerusalem. And it's prophesied that. And the song reflects that day and says, in that day, I will give thanks to you, O Lord.

And Nehemiah chapter 9 and 10 speaks about that when the people come back from captivity to Jerusalem. We're told that then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them, this day is holy to the Lord, your God.

Don't mourn and weep for all the people have been weeping as they listened to the words of the law. Nehemiah said, go, enjoy choice food and sweet drinks and send some of those to those who have nothing prepared.

This day is holy to the Lord. Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength. And this song here is pointing forward to that other rescue of the people from Babylon, another captivity like Egypt, where they come back into the promised land and where they sing praises to God for His salvation. And it's just a reminder also of the prophetic voice of God speaking forward.

[10:07] We have in the previous chapter seen the remnants returning and the root coming out of the stump and the seed pointing forward to the coming of the Messiah to Emmanuel, Jesus Christ, the child who would come.

And so we know this song also speaks forward and speaks into and describes the salvation that would come from the Messiah, that would come from Jesus Christ, the song of the redeemed. And I'm going to read another little section from Scripture because it's very applicable in links to all the Romans chapter 15 where Paul is speaking to the people of God and he says, for I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and moreover that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. As it is written, therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, I will sing the praises of your name, again it says, rejoice you Gentiles with His people and again praise the Lord, owe you Gentiles, let all the peoples extol Him and again, here we go, as Isaiah says, the root of Jesse, which we looked at last week speaking about Jesus, will spring up one who will arise to rule over the nations in Him the Gentiles will hope, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him. So there's this linking of the old messianic call and song that is sung here through to the song that believers and Gentiles sing that is spoken about in the song.

[11:50] And so there's a progression within the song throughout Scripture which takes us right through to something that hasn't happened yet to the future, to Revelation and to the new heavens and the new earth.

In verse 15, verse 3 of Revelation 15, they held harps given to them by God, sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb, great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God almighty, just and true are ways, king of the nations.

So we find there's a, the song's thread goes right through Scripture and the words of this song here in Isaiah 12 are the foundational words that apply to God's great act of rescue and salvation for all of us.

And I think that's hugely significant and encouraging as we see this song. So the theme of the song is twofold, it's individual and it's also corporate.

The first couple of verses are in the first person. You will say in that day, I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, you're angry, it's turned away that you might come for me. Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid.

[13:07] For the Lord God is my strength and my song, He has become my salvation. So you've got these first two verses that are extremely personal.

And that's important for us to remember as Christ's and as Christians that we have a personal song to sing. We have a theme that we can praise God with in our lives.

And there's something tremendously individualistic about our faith, even though we'll speak a little bit later on about the corporate nature of our faith as well.

And in that song that we sing, there's a recognition of God's just anger against us. Just as this song speaks of a revelation of God to the people in the Old Testament and to individuals, I will give thanks for though you were angry with me, your anger was turned away.

And it's an ongoing part of our testimony of our song that we recognize that God's purity is on a completely different level to ours and that we have no way of making ourselves right with Him.

[14:15] And by nature, He is justly angry with the way that we treat Him and that we reject Him and that we think of sin. We shrug our shoulders at sin and say, well, what's the big deal?

We're not being judged, we're not being killed by God. We'll never die in the same way that Satan spoke to Adam and Eve at the very beginning. We may be spending our lives comparing ourselves with others and thinking we're not quite so bad, the greatest lie of Satan all the time, that God can't possibly be angry with me in my sinful nature.

Until possibly, we ourselves are rejected by others. So possibly others turn their backs on us in a way that we feel is very unjustifiable or people are thankless when we are committed and sacrificial towards them or unloving.

And we sense within us a welling up of anger against being so unjustly treated and their backs turning against us.

We begin in a tiny, tiny, tiny little way to glimpse the wrath of the Creator God who alone is worthy of our worship, the primacy of our love and our devotion as we have the audacity just to push Him off the throne.

[15 : 39] Off you go, God. I'll be the one who makes the decisions. Be like having a loving earthly father who we steal from his bank account without letting him know.

When we see Him, we punch Him in the face and when He comes to our house, we lock Him out. And we can feel the injustice of that human level.

How much more is God just in His wrath against us and we see that as believers. We recognize it, but we thank Him and praise Him and sing a song because His anger has turned away.

Your anger has turned away. The price has been paid. It's atoned for. You know, the day of atonement spoke. The sacrifices spoke. They pointed forward to the one who would come Himself, Jesus Christ, and who would redeem Him.

They escaped the redemption from Israel, from Egypt, the blood and the lentils, the captivity that the chains are broken, all of it speaking of God's mercy.

[16 : 47] God's anger being turned away because He atoned. He provided the sacrifice. He provided salvation and hope. You know, going right back to Abram, Ephraim and Isaac and all these pictures that point forward to the coming of Jesus.

And so we praise Him tonight. We praise Him and sing songs of praise because we can look back and see what Jesus has done and understand the day of atonement and understand the price that was paid and understand that we are unworthy to receive His mercy, but we praise Him because the offer of His mercy is full and free and we've received it as a gift.

So we praise Him for the life that we now have with Him. And we sing our song. You know, we have a song that we sing to Him, and the Lord is our strength and our salvation, and we are no longer afraid.

The Lord God is my strength and my song. What's your song? What song do you sing? What's the words of your song as you sing spiritually?

We find here that the Lord is referred to seven times throughout this short song, the Lord with the small capitals, the redeeming Lord, the Messiah God is the Holy One.

[18 : 12] And the song is highlighting the relational aspect of our walk with God. We are in relationship with my Lord.

My song is that we know the living God ourselves. And we find great comfort from Him. Your angriest turned away that you might comfort me.

And we're comforted tonight as Christians because if you're a believer this evening, death has lost its sting.

God is no longer angry with us and can never be angry with us in a judgmental way because that anger has been poured out on His own beloved Son, and death has lost its sting.

Lewis mentioned some of the older people here. I hope you weren't referring to me, Lewis. You probably were, among others. Not as we get older, death gets closer, but we take great comfort in knowing that it's lost its sting.

[19 : 13] Some of our loved ones die and we lose them. But for them, if they're Christ, death has lost its sting and there's great comfort in us and we can sing that song.

Fear has gone from us. I will trust and not be afraid. It's a relationship we're called to, a relationship of trust we're called to that enables us not to be afraid.

Fear has got so much fear in our lives, so much there might be this evening that you're afraid of, and yet we're called to be reminded that ultimate fear is taken from us because we are loved and redeemed and cared for by the living God who is our Savior.

I'll say it again, 365, do not fears in the Bible one for every day. Because He knows that as our natural inclination.

And there's also great joy. With joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And this is where the song begins to transition from the first person to the second person plural.

[20 : 25] But there's that joy in our lives, deep seated gladness, celebration. I think too often we say, ah yes, there's joy in the Christian life, but you don't need to show it.

It's very deep down. Well, you know, I don't think that's necessarily true at all. We know that our joy as Christians isn't circumstantial.

We certainly know it's not slapstick and trivial, but I do think it should still be something that is displayed in our life, the character of our life, the demeanor of our life is one of joy because it comes from hope and it comes from something that's real in our lives.

So we shouldn't be misery, guts and negative about life and about where we're going because joy, deep seated joy despite our circumstances should be what sets us apart as well as unlimited satisfaction.

We draw well from the water from the well of salvation. It's that nourishment, that discipleship model that we see from Jeremiah, isn't it, that the root, the tree beside the...

[21 : 38] It doesn't matter what the heat comes upon them, what it's like in life, what the drought is like because the roots are gaining great energy in life from the water, the living water that flows beside it.

And that's our song. That's where we find our satisfaction is coming from a relationship with Jesus Christ, the help and the perspective, the peace, the stability, the endurance comes from that prayer life that we have in Christ.

And we sing about that. We sing about it because it reminds us of who we are and the relationship we should have in an ongoing way with Jesus.

That's our experience. And we sing about it to remind ourselves of that. You think of the woman of Samaria and Jesus offering the water of life to her and never thirst again.

Is that our experience? It's a challenge for us sometimes, isn't it? You finding that hard to pray, spending time with God, just work on it again, go back to Him.

[22 : 47] Keep going back to Him when you're dissatisfied or when you're fearful or when you're not joyful in your walk, just go back to Him. Just ask Him, please let me sing this song again.

Help me to sing again the song of your salvation. So there's that individual and very briefly, honestly, there's the corporate as it moves from I to you and it's you, second person, plural really from verse 3 onwards.

And that's just a reminder that the second half of the song is a call to the people of God together. Give thanks to the Lord, call in His name, make known His deeds among the people, proclaim His name as exalted.

Sing praise to the Lord for He's done gloriously. Let this be known in all there. Shout and sing for joy, oh inhabitants of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. So there's this song that we recognize is corporate.

You know, great to sing in the bath, great to sing in the shower, but it's not just a private song that we sing spiritually. It's not just a song on their own.

[23 : 58] However great it is to sing on their own, it's even better to sing in a big company of people, isn't it? Or church, stadium, what a buzz you get from singing with 50,000, 60,000 people.

And there's an element in which praise has always been intended for that, the hosts of heaven singing praise to the living God. And the song that you share as an individual Christian tonight when you make the effort to come and worship corporately with God's people, as you come because you want to, part of it is to share the same experiences you have with others who also have that.

And it's a great encouragement to be built up in that way. We're reflecting that we share the same values, that we have the same Father who has died on the same cross and has paid the price for our sins.

And there's something tremendously powerful about corporate praise that we're called to be involved in, something greatly encouraging about thanking God together, calling on His name. So when we pray, praise, when we sing in church, it's a spiritual act of unity that is encouraging to one another.

[25 : 14] We are building one another up. We are reminding ourselves we belong to His kingdom. We're thinking so much of what He has done for us.

I think it's important never to relegate the significance of the gospel community and praise as part of that. It's easy to find fault, isn't it, with the church group, the church family.

It's easy to stay away. It's easy to blame, to institutionalize, to make excuses, to avoid involvement in it because of the cost. It's easy to recoil from and yet it's, it were called to praise together and be an encouragement to one another.

I was, we were at Friends last night and I took a book away with me from Friends House and it's a Bonhoeffer book which I meant to take in and read a quote from it because it was brilliant and it's, he's just speaking about the importance of community, gospel community and he was writing of course in the shadow of Nazi Germany and all the horrors of what was going to happen and what's happening there and he talked about the fact that gospel community is not easy, it's not light but it's

hugely significant and important for expressing praise and for developing unity and for understanding who we are in Jesus Christ.

So there's that, there's that unity of song and for us as it was for the Old Testament people who sung this song and for us again it points forward to a not yet of fulfillment.

[26 : 54] We look forward to the revelation story. We look forward to the new heavens and the new earth within dwells righteousness and when we sing and when we praise and when we gather together we're doing in shadow with all our failings what we look forward to in perfection.

So Sunday's a great day for that because it reminds us of what lies ahead when we will gather without failing, without tears, without sin, without failing, without parting, without separation and where all of redeemed humanity will sing a sweet song of praise in perfect harmony to the glory of God and a righteous society.

We're not going to be sitting in white gear plucking on the harps and in the clouds, it's not always going to be like, it's going to be a song, a society of song, a society of working song, a society of serving song, a society of harmonious song and praise and beauty to the living God, a righteous society.

And when we sing this song of praise to God here, we remind ourselves, or sorry, we remind the nations among us, make known his deeds among the people, proclaim that his name is exalted. The song we sing is a song of confidence in our God that we proclaim to the world. So there's an evangelistic element to our community life as a church and to our worship to even the doors being open on a Sunday and for people being able to come in.

[28 : 29] But not just that, our whole lives as worship together as we seek by our lives to... The song of our lives is to make him known, is to make his beauty known and to share that joyous message.

Our lives shouldn't... The song that we sing shouldn't be a dirge. It shouldn't make people look at us and say, pfft, whatever they've got, I don't want any of it.

It should be a song of joy and celebration, not a dirge. And we are called to bring the conversation and the lives of those around us, around to the hope that is in our lives.

We see that again and again, do we? The reason for the hope, and this is a song of hope, of purpose, our relationship with our Creator, accountability to the living God and through Jesus Christ.

It's not just a lifestyle choice, good enough for me, but it's not of interest to anyone else. We are reuniting strangers to their father when we tell people about Jesus.

[29 : 36] And God calls His remnant people, you and I, to sing that song in the world in which we live. Let's pray.

Father, God help us to sing your song with joy and with solemnity, with celebration. May it not be a cheap song that we sing.

May it not be words that trip off our lips but don't reach into our hearts or don't come from our hearts. You know the beauty and the power of a song that is molded and created and the words are written by someone from the heart.

Well, each of us has that song as believers. We're not singing someone else's song. We're reminding the world and reminding our fellow believers and reminding ourselves that our song is individual, that Jesus has saved us.

We have much to sing about, much to praise Him and much to do in praise together. So we thank you for this song and we pray that you would bless us this week.

[30 : 48] Remind us as we looked at your Word this morning of listening with a view to allowing our hearts to be molded by you. Holy Spirit, please speak into our hearts and lives, we ask.

And go before us together and individually. In Jesus' name, amen.