

Sing!

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[0 : 0 0] I want to look, as I've mentioned already, I want to look just at the theme of singing for a little while this evening, singing praise at the beginning of Psalm 96. We have sing to the Lord, a new song, sing to the Lord all the earth, sing to the Lord, praise His name, proclaim His salvation day after day. I think singing for us is a greater or maybe a lesser important part of our lives, maybe more important for some people than for others, but I think probably in our tradition and in our thinking it's maybe a little bit of the Cinderella part of worship in the sense that it's regarded as something you just get through till you get to the sermon, you've got to go through a couple of singings and then you come to the real thing, which is the word. But of course when we're singing, we're singing the word or we're singing the truth of the word and it's a hugely significant and important part of worship to know and to remember that as it is commanded to us here in this great significant book of the Bible is the Bible, the book of praise and the book of prayers and song. And there's a wonderful verse if you wonder about the genesis of song and the importance and the significant spiritually of song from God and in God's mind then we have a great wonderful verse in Zephaniah chapter 3. Tremendous words where the Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save, He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing. I think we find it hard to conceive of God's singing because somehow, well I'm not quite sure why we find that difficult, maybe because we recognise Him as Spirit. But we have this great recognition that we are made in God's image and He has made us to be people who will use this wonderfully created gift that He has given us for Him because it reflects Him and it's like Him and it is an expression for us of our praise to Him. So I want to look at just four things very briefly this evening about singing biblically that's something that's important to us because as I said I think I mentioned in the prayer that we come together week after week and every week we sing. We pray and we read the word but the singing particularly for us in the church here is something that we are actually practically involved in a little bit more as it were although you know I'm always banging on about being active even as you listen and that's very important. But we are really involved at that level in the singing and so I think it's important for us not to participate in that important section of our worship thoughtlessly and carelessly remember what a significant part of worship it is. I think in the first place we recognise it as the language very much of the heart. Sam 30 verse 12 says you turned my morning into dancing you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy that my heart may sing to you and not be silent oh Lord my God I will give you thanks forever.

Now the heart singing may not necessarily be the voice singing always but I think the voice is often the expression of the heart. I think it's possible for us to sing in our hearts but I think normally that the praise that he's given us is to be expressed from our heart but verbally and with sound through our voices Ephesians 5 19 sing and to make music in your heart the two are linked together sing and make music in your heart always giving thanks to God. So it's very much in many ways as we consider it's the language of the heart it expresses our emotion and our sense of worship at that level and you know that happens in life doesn't it? How often do we know and see and appreciate maybe particularly today more than ever the power of song as it expresses the emotions of people's lives and hearts both love and hate and sorrow and joy how significant how important today are songwriters and in many ways they often are dictating what many people are thinking about things because they express the language of the heart and often political movements and philosophical movements are expressed in song because they are significant at that level and spiritually that is no different there's that recognition that God has given us song as a way of expressing the inexpressible and therefore it has great significance because we are to use song to express our faith and to express our worship to the living God and the feelings of our heart it is therefore a deeply personal thing as we participate in it together it is a personal reflection of our living faith in

Jesus Christ and such are hugely significant and the songs of David the Psalms of David are those kind of expressions not just of Joy now we may be focusing more this evening on praise and joy but the Psalms express in ways that no hymns or other kind of songs will do express great sorrow amazing doubt tremendous fear anger testimony there's all kinds of emotion and expressions of the heart given in song I can't remember now what the event was something very sad happened in the congregation or someone had died or we had heard some bad news and we just happened to be singing a hugely sad song sad Sam and it was one that that you know you would sometimes look at see well how can you sing that in public worship and it's very mournful and very contemplative at that level but I remember many people some of you may remember this and might remember both the Sam and the occasion which I can't but many people found that the most outstanding expression and that's why we can sing for example at funerals and wise why singing at funerals can be so powerful as they express grief and as they express sorrow and also joy I remember also and this is slightly changing the subject well not changing the subject but changing the emphasis being a funeral and the previous congregation was in Raskin but it was in the church of Scotland and in Vorgordon and it was a young person who died in a car accident and the church was packed hundreds and hundreds of people were there mainly young people mainly people from school from high school and it was a traditional service and they sang hymns and it was very controlled and you know the

people sung the hymns and the older people especially knew these hymns most of the young people didn't know them and it was all very controlled but at the end of the service as the remains were being taken there was a song came over the loudspeakers a popular song from the day I'm not sure you raise me up or one of these songs and at that point all the young people just broke into tears because that for them was they'd expressed they knew that that song expressed what they felt it wasn't spiritual it wasn't I'm not saying it was right and it was a reflection of society in which we lived that that was much more powerful to them than the hymns were or the Psalms would have been because they didn't know them really but this song that they sung expressed how they felt and it was the way that they then went on to show emotion and we look for that in our spiritual lives that the songs we sing express for us spiritually the language of our hearts and we recognise that this great Sam here expresses the nature and the character of God and his salvation and his judgment and it looks forward to a new creation and this amazing reality of song even through an in creation that we can look forward to after and following his judgment and so it's a marvellous expression of the language of the heart therefore for us we need to ask the question as we worship tonight when we sing how real is it for us how much have we thought through that we are singing and expressing the language of our hearts and the faith that we have it ought to be something that reflects for us the reality of our Christian experience and the understanding of what we're doing I would imagine because

I know my own heart and I know my own experience that I will go through many services and I've chosen this the Psalms and the hymns with thoughtlessly and I'll come away and I'll not think and I'll not consider what I've sung and that is a shame that's a shame to Jesus name and it's a shame in our worship that we can at a human level sing in an easy and in a lazy and in a passive way where we're simply going through the motions and we're not using the words of scripture or the words of truth to say I am here I'm here to praise and I'm here to worship God and he's given me song to do so and this is a reflection of my heart and so often I think that we we we regard this song at an entertainment level how it's we've enjoyed the music or we've enjoyed the tune or we've enjoyed the harmony and all of these things are significant and important but none of them should take from us the significance of expressing our heart worship to the living God and the activity of doing so so in many ways each of us are being asked to make music in our hearts when we worship when we come together and to reflect that in song and if we are serious about that then even the songs that we sing in our worship it challenges us about our faith and challenges about our living relationship with Christ and challenges if we can sing these words and if they do mean anything to them and if they are an expression of our own hearts and of our own praise and therefore there should be in many ways each time we sing there should be self reflection and there should be self examination as we consider the Christ to whom we're singing and the gift that he's given and the obedience we've been asked to sing with I wonder if possibly the singing is a thermometer as to our spiritual condition sometimes and I'm not saying that's necessarily the case but I do wonder and it's often the way and preachers maybe are sometimes more aware of that very often the sense of

God's spirit when you come into the worship public worship together will be reflected in the way the singing is going that's maybe not always the case but very often there's that sense of living vibrant worship through the song as we start the service and it can assess the tone very much for the whole set not indisputably of course but maybe from week to week there's that sense in which well I think everyone's just got out of bed today and hasn't thought of anything and have come tired and weary and are really going through the motions and then we and then there's a preacher you look at yourself and say well maybe that's exactly what I've done as well going through the motions of worship and praise and we must never allow the reality of the ritual of worship which is a good ritual to become simply a ritual and it must be an ongoing week to week expression of our faith and praise so there is the question for us about preparation and the importance of preparation not just for singing but for worship generally together as we consider that that we do it's required of us I think spiritually that we will receive more from the word and from the worship and we will give more as our hearts are prepared and as we have considered our own expressions of praise and coming together our response our needs our feelings it's so significant that we come to worship in the house of God with a sense of being prepared of doing business with the living God and of coming together to worship him and that's really in many ways what I think will enable the worship here to be a powerful experience when each of us have come recognising our responsibility recognising our privileges recognising our debt to Jesus and the honour of coming together and worshipping him so there's clearly a sense in which it's the language of the heart but and these are all kind of overlapping and intertwined it's always it's also the language of the crowd and very much we find that in scripture come let us sing to the Lord that is out for joy to the Lord that has come before him with praise and thanksgiving and Sam 126 where we all come up to the house of God and praise him and give thanks to him these Psalms of assent that we've seen before and again [14:56] I think it's a very significant and important part of the community of believers coming together in worship and again we see it reflected in life you see you see sports events this singing that reflects the crowd response and reaction and worship we see it concerts people coming together for great concerts and this amazing experience of singing and crowds together and what a buzz and what an excitement and what an amazing thing it is and so spiritually singing is very much the language of the people the language of the community the language of the crowd the language of the kingdom language of the people together as the people came up to the temple they came and worship and they came and worship together and the New Testament church as it looked forward look forward to that amazing day in Revelation 19 6 which speaks about I heard what sounded like a great multitude like the roaring of our rushing waters like the loud peels of thunder as the crowd of believers in the city of God came together to worship and praise him and so there's that great sense of society and worship of not simply individualism and personal preparation but a people coming together and that that is a really important part of corporate worship when we come together and sing it's that that actual outworking of being a people we sing together you know it'd be strange if we came together let's sing and everyone started singing different songs at different paces and different times and facing different ways it would be a cacophony of just strange sound wouldn't it there's a unity in the fact that we come together and we sing the songs of God together because song is an expression of our unity in Christ have you ever sung in a crowd whether it's a Christian crowd or it's a crowd and a sports event or a concert you will sense unity with that crowd hey we're all in this together we're all here to listen and we're all here to watch we're all here to sing and so in worship there's that sense in which song is that expression of unity in Christ that we are coming together to worship what what he is who he is and what he's done and we have much more reason to sing heartily

I don't really care if people can't sing musically I don't care if you haven't a note in your heads musically it's about singing from our heart and our soul and that reflection of a sense of unity and oneness that we have in Christ that is what we have we are one in Christ and along with that sense of unity is is the encouragement that comes from that great encouragement you'll all have been in congregations where the sense of worship through the singing has been dreadful awful signs been dire and is discouraging nobody singing something you go to some churches and hardly anybody's and in the minister's position you're in a kind of privileged position you're facing everyone you can see everyone and now that can be encouragement could also be greatly discouraging and I'm sure maybe as the congregation looks at the minister it can sometimes be hugely discouraging to do so but we you know think sometimes we do need to think about how we sing our expressions whether

we're encouraging others around us by the unity and the heartiness and the whole heartiness of our praise and worship as we express and share together great encouragement in that so we can you know you know all need encouragement you know all need to be built up and song is one of the ways in which we are encouraged and built up and there is a reality that as we sing together and as we sing powerfully to our that we simply open up heaven because the gathering of God's people is a foretaste of heaven it's meant to be a foretaste of heaven and that includes the singing you know it includes our praise and that's hugely significant for people that come in that they taste that the spirit of God is here and they know that when we sing we're worshiping a living saviour an important person in our lives and therefore we look to encourage one another in that way with our singing and it should be I think for us spine tingling in many instances when we gather together so when we we never want the situation to be that the ones at the front here are performing for you just as we never want the minister to be here to perform is here to bring the word and humbly be under the word so the leaders at the front are to be those who the congregation is to be the choir the congregation is to be the ones who sing we never want to get to the place where our professionalism and we seek to be the very best we can be and that's important and biblical but it never replaces the reality and the power of the people coming together and song we don't want to be entertained we don't want a performance at the front we want those that are front offering their gifts and their abilities to lead the congregation in worship and in praise and that's a hugely significant role and you should we should be praying for them just as much as we pray for all who are involved in serving and part of the worship in the church so it's the language of the crowd it's also the language of worship itself and we recognize come let us sing let us worship before him and extoll him praise him with music and song it is the way God has given us expression and devotion and adoration and in worthy praise he is in other words he's worthy of our song he's worthy of our praise and it's a place where we offer to him our worship and we learn about his character his word his prophecy his history his testimony and it is given to us in order to do that so it should I believe reflect in our lives a sense of reverence and worship in Psalm 65 in verse 8 we have this translation the whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders where morning dawns where evening fades you call forth songs of joy so there's a link between the awe and reverence and the songs of joy doesn't you know mean we sing mournfully to be reverential and to be awestruck is not to not sing with joy but it is to be awestruck at who God is in his character and that is it's hugely we can't manufacture that I think all we can do is pray for that because we can't manufacture awe but it should be that in our lives and in our song and in our praise there is a weighty reverence so we don't sing flippantly however joyfully we say I'm not saying don't sing joyfully but I'm saying don't sing flippantly don't sing lightly don't sing rebelliously so that we come to church on a Sunday and sing praise to God heartily and just give it yee-ha and then for the rest of the week we're simply living as lords of our own life and we're not giving him that rightful place of awe and worship and obedience because that's hypocrisy and that can't be for us in our Christian life so we can see that praise and singing is intimately related to our own Christianity and our own Christian faith and it can be that we are quenching the spirit if we are not adoring him through our song as a reflection of the living sacrifice of our lives so in a sense what you've done from last Monday to today will probably colour and mould the praise that you've offered tonight not in the sense of we come to a place to earn the favour of God but as a reflection of the lives we live that we come to him at the beginning of a new week in praise and in adoration so there's a great sense in which it is the language of worship at that level and I think it's also the language of worship in the sense of it being revelatory is that songs teach us scripture, teaches truth and the great things about singing the Psalms isn't it that we learn truth, we learn scripture and the hymns we learn the great salvation truths and the great truths about Jesus Christ and the gospel message and let the songs of our worship educate your soul you know I can go to my kids or any kids around and they will be able to repeat hundreds and hundreds of lyrics of songs hundreds of lyrics of songs and I'll hear a song in the radio too because that's what you listen to when you're over 50 radio too and I'll be able to hear a song that I haven't heard for 35 years and I'll know all the lyrics of the song every single verse because song is a hugely significant teaching revelatory way of remembering things and we had folks in today for lunch and they were talking about their strict upbringing how they were taught all the Psalms and indeed the whole of Jonah and other books in the Bible even when they weren't believers and having come to faith that these come back to them and educate them and teach them about their God and so we know and we appreciate and we recognize the power of song as revelation and as teaching us and reminding us and renewing truth in our minds and so it has a hugely significant place to play and worship at

that level please don't think of singing as just leading up to the sermon is a significant and important and central part of a worship and the last thing

I would just say about singing is that it is I believe clearly from scripture the language of heaven it's the language of heaven even in Psalm 5 in verse 11 we told but let all who take refuge in you be glad let them ever sing for joy that will be one thing that will be continuous between this world and the world to come but much better will be praise adoration and song is amazing revelatory passages in the last book of the Bible all inspiring fellowship people of God together great numbers heart expression on a cosmic scale so many that it just can't be counted and they can you imagine the buzz of singing with that kind of crowd presumably all in tune presumably all with perfected voices and glorious harmonies with a clear vision of who Jesus Christ is and praising before him and glorifying him at that great supper of the lamb and not only will they be praising but I think the Sam 96 hence that all creation will be praising the trees of the forest will sing for joy the fields will be jubilant and everything in them because the curse will have gone the fields will be saying because there will be no more weeds to choke the growth and no more rocks to stop things being fruitful and it will be tremendous this whole universe will in the new heavens in the new earth be able to sing praise to God and I think that it will take on a depth and a level that we simply can't really appreciate here so when we sing as I said earlier it's anticipated because it's also the language of heaven it is a reflection of the king of kings that we will go to live with and our life as we sing it's preparing us for heaven and that is an important and significant reality for us that when we come to worship we come to praise and I say let's stand and sing us and you stand up think another five or six verses remind yourself it's not the end of the story that this is to point us forward to something far better that it is anticipated for us at that level and so singing in worship should inspire hope for us should inspire hope that the bleak and the miserable and the frustrating world in which we live with so much bad news with so much bitterness with so many difficulties and problems and trials and different and struggles is not all that there is and so when we come to sing it inspires hope within us so that even in our darkest moments there should be songs we can sing and song isn't just about praise and adoration in the good times and in times of joy in many ways there's nothing more powerful than song through tears and song through bitterness and darkness as we express our feelings before God so maybe that when we gather together in our worship in our lives generally but when we gather together in our worship that we do consider song as of spiritual significance and in many ways a thermometer for us and a hope to inspire us forward and to keep us going may it be encouraging for us may it be uplifting may it be uniting and may it be Christ centred and Christ reflecting so let us pray and then

[30 : 52] sing Father God we ask and pray that you would remind us that we don't sing because it's traditional and we don't sing as well that's just what you do when you come together we sing because you've ordained praise we sing because you've commanded us to praise you we sing because you've given us voices to praise and because we have every reason to praise and we are amazed that God looks over us with songs of joy and we are amazed at the creativity and beauty and splendour and glorious reality of a God who has given us this expression and given us all the beauty that goes with it we ask that we wouldn't use song as is so often used in this world in which we live to be destructive or brutal or atheistic or using song in a way that is idolatrous but that we would recognise and know the pure beauty and glory of the songs that you've given us and of the voices that we are to use for your glory we thank you even in the city when we can wake up sometimes and hear the birds singing and how amazing that is in its complexity and yet in its simplicity and we ask that as we praise we may reflect the saviour in whose name we sing the psalmist speaks of singing a new song and indeed we have a new song to sing every day because of what Jesus has done because he is coming to judge the world in righteousness because he has come as saviour and Lord and because the cross and the resurrection and the ascension have given us such great reasons for praise so as we close our worship this evening may we praise you with adoration and meaning and may even in this moment it reflect our hearts as we seek to be close to you through forgiveness and grace and through the work of Jesus Christ and may it inspire and encourage us as we go into this week that we have entered to live lives of praise and to be living sacrifices encourages all help us all help us not only in our praise but in our lives to encourage one another it is easy to discourage and it is easy to ignore and it is easy to be alone help us to be together in Christ. Amen.