

Congregational Singing

Psalm 96

**Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!
Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!
Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity."
Let the heavens be glad, and let 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 before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.**

Last week we finished our series on the 10 commandments, and soon we'll be starting a new series, but this morning I want to talk about something that's really important to me, and to us as a church.

I want to talk about congregational singing this morning.

This isn't something that preachers talk about a lot, but I think it's really important, and that often times as a church, we're missing out on the purpose and the joy of singing together as the church.

It's common practice today for us to sing in church, but have you ever wondered why we sing?

What's the purpose of our singing?

What do we seek to accomplish through our singing?

Answering the question why we sing is really simple. We sing because God commands it. Both in the Old and the New Testaments we are commanded to sing to the Lord!

We read it just earlier...Sing to the Lord all the earth! That's not a suggestion, that's a command.

Whether you're musically inclined or not, you are commanded to sing.

I was visiting another church many years back, and there was a young man sitting on the front row, and he was singing louder than I've ever heard anyone sing in church. And it was a small church. And this guy couldn't carry a tune to save his life. But you know what? I loved every minute of it, because this guy was so excited to be worshipping with his church. He had so much joy, he couldn't help singing at the top of his lungs.

Whether you're a good singer or not doesn't matter. We are commanded to sing to the Lord!

But why? What's the purpose? What do we accomplish? That's the question I want to explore this morning.

I'm willing to bet that many of you may think the answer to the question is completely obvious...We sing to worship God...Singing is an expression of worship.

And you're absolutely right, but I want to suggest to you this morning, that's it's a lot more than that as well.

1. We are singing to God, to express adoration and worship; to give Him the praise He's due.
2. We are singing to each other to build up and edify the church by proclaiming the gospel to each other.
3. We are singing to non believers who don't know Christ, that they might see the love and unity of the church and behold the beauty of Christ and His gospel.

So let's look at each of those 3 purposes in turn.

Sing to the Lord!

Three times Psalm 96 tells us to sing to the Lord, and then in verses 4-6 it tells us why.

Verse 4: Because He's great! We naturally praise and glorify things that are beautiful and awe-inspiring.

I praise my wife, not because I'm obligated to, but because she's beautiful. She's beautiful to look at, but her heart, her soul, her mind...she's beautiful in every way.

And praising her or honoring her is the natural overflow from seeing and enjoying her beauty!

Last year our family went to the Grand Canyon with Caleb and Amari, and I can't describe how breathtaking that first view of the canyon is.

It's so much bigger, so much more awe-inspiring than I could have ever imagined. And all the pictures in the world can't do it justice...you just have to see it.

And when we got home everyone asked us, "How was it?"

And what did I say? I praised it! Because it was so beautiful and so magnificent, that I couldn't help myself.

If praise, and adoration are not your hearts response towards our great God, then maybe you've never seen his beauty...maybe you've only ever seen the pictures. Or maybe you've lost sight and forgotten.

We sing to the Lord because He's great; He's beautiful, majestic, powerful, glorious...He's above all gods.

And that is usually where we stop when we talk about singing. So we turn worship/praise into a private time of intimacy between me and Jesus.

This is time for me and Jesus, so let me forget about everyone around me and just enjoy my time with God.

And when we do this, worship becomes very self-centered. It becomes about my experience.

I was talking to a friend once, and he told me about a mega church he visited on the east coast. And he talked about how they shut the lights off, and how the music was so loud that you couldn't even hear the person next to you singing.

And he talked about it as if that were a really great thing.

But that begs the question...if worship and singing is just about me and God (let's tune everything else out), then why bother going to church?

And what I want you to see in the Scriptures this morning, is that when we sing, we are singing to God, of course, but we are also singing to each other!

When we sing, we are not just singing to God, but we are also singing to each other, to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The church sings to God, but it also must sing to each other.

Verse 2: Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

We are to tell of the Lord's salvation from day to day, but who are we telling? Are we telling God? Does God need to be reminded of the gospel? No!

Who needs to be reminded of the gospel? We do!

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

The word of Christ means the words about Christ, and the words Christ spoke himself...or in other words, the gospel.

So the gospel is to dwell in us as we teach and admonish each other. So teaching and discipling is not just the job of the pastor/elders...it's the job of every member of the church. We are to teach and disciple each other, and how do we do that?

Part of how we do that is through our singing together!

We sing as a church, to each other, to edify and disciple each other, by singing the gospel.

And we sing the gospel to each other, because we need to be reminded of it every chance we get.

Last week we talked about not coveting, and being content, and realizing that Christ is all that we need.

And if you're like me you're like, yes that's true! I'm going to content this week.

And then you wake up Monday morning and the day doesn't go the way you want it to and you start to be anxious and irritable...BECAUSE WE FORGET!

We forget how big God is. We forget his promises. We forget the transforming power of the gospel, and we need to be reminded. Over and over and over.

And so we sing the gospel to each other to help remind ourselves of how big and how great and how glorious God is!

This is the reason why we will always be picky about the songs we sing in here.

There are a lot of catchy songs out there that don't say very much, but we want to sing to glorious truths of God and his gospel.

Let me show you what I mean:

There is a river where goodness flows. There is a fountain that drowns sorrows. There is an ocean deeper than fear. The tide is rising, rising.

There is a current stirring deep inside. It's overflowing from the heart of God. The flood of heaven crashing over us. The tide is rising, rising.

Bursting, bursting, up from the ground, we feel it now. Bursting, bursting, up from the ground, we feel it now.

We come alive in the river (x 4)

There's nothing necessarily wrong with those lyrics...they're not heretical, but they don't really help me. They don't teach me about God; they don't proclaim the gospel!

You know what helps me?

To sing: My sin, Oh the bliss of this glorious thought. My sin not in part, but the whole. Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord Oh my soul.

But as I ran my hell-bound race, indifferent to the cost. You looked upon my helpless state, and led me to the cross. And I beheld God's love displayed, you suffered in my place. You bore the wrath reserved for me, now all I know is grace.

What riches of kindness he lavished on us. His blood was the payment, his life was the cost. We stood 'neath a debt we could never afford. Our sins they are many, his mercy is more.

That's what I need to hear, that's what I need to sing. Because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.

So we sing in adoration to the Lord, we sing the gospel to each other, but we also sing as a witness to those who don't know Christ.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! (v3)

Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns...he will judge the peoples with equity." (v10)

When the psalmist is referencing the nations, he's talking about the gentile nations who do not know Yahweh/God.

The essence of the Christian life is to declare God's glory among the nations. To declare the good news of the gospel...the good news that Jesus reigns!

And we declare that with our lives as a whole. The way we live, the way we love, the way we dwell together in unity as the body of Christ should demonstrate the glory of God and his gospel.

And that includes our singing/our praise/our worship. Joining together in loving unity, singing the truths of the gospel together, acts as a powerful witness to the outside world...to those who don't have hope, who don't have joy, who don't have life!

Every week there are people in here that don't have hope! They've filled their lives with everything they can think of, and they're still empty.

And singing together is an opportunity to express and proclaim the hope and the joy and the life we have in Jesus Christ! What an awesome privilege!

So when we gather together and sing, it's not just about me and Jesus.

Singing is a time to adore the Lord.

And it's a time to love and build up my brother and sister in Christ.

And it's a time to witness to those around me who don't know Jesus...who need to taste and see that the Lord is good.

And when we get this, it will transform the way we worship. Because it's not all about me!

It doesn't matter if the style of music is my favorite, or if they play my favorite songs.

What matters is that I have the amazing privilege of honoring Christ, building up fellow members of the body, and witnessing to those who are lost.

That's why we sing!

I'm going to ask my friend Caleb Daniel to come up, and he's going to share with you how this theology of singing has influenced his life and his relationship with the Lord and with the church.