

Living Church: Singing to God

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

- [0 : 0 0] It's on page 603, and also turn please to Colossians chapter 3, which is on page 1184. Colossians chapter 3, and that's on page 1184. So we're going to read from Psalm 98 first, we're going to read that together, and then we're going to read Colossians 3. 15 to 17. So let's read Psalm 98 together.
- We are not only singing, it is a song. We're not only saying this to God, but we are also saying it to one another for our own mutual encouragement.
- So let's read Psalm 98 together. Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.
- [1 : 1 0] His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.
- He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
- Burst into jubilant song with music. Make music to the Lord with the harp. With the harp and the sound of singing. With trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn.
- Shout for joy before the Lord, the King. Let the sea resound and everything in it. The world and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands.
- Let the mountains sing together for joy. Let them sing before the Lord. For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.
- [2 : 1 0] And then turn please to Colossians 3. And I'm going to read verses 15 to 17. Colossians 3, 15 to 17 on page 1184.
- Colossians 3, starting at verse 15. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. Since as members of one body you are called to peace. And be thankful.
- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. As you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. And as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
- With gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do. Whether in word or deed. Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Giving thanks to God the Father through him.
- Well, in our series we've been taking an aspect of what we do on a Sunday morning as our gathering together. And this morning we're going to be looking at singing.
- [3 : 2 6] Because singing is a big part of what we do when we come together. Now, I've talked or written, if you like, about this before. If you look on our church website, there is a series of three articles on the theme of worship.
- Which addresses the whole issue of singing. So, I'm not going to try and repeat everything there. And say the same thing here. But I do encourage you to look at that on the church website.
- You can read through what that has to say. And it also directs a little bit about those who lead in singing. So, I just let you know about that.

But we're going to pray now and ask for God's help as we look at his word together. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for your many gifts to us.

We thank you for the gift of song and of music. We thank you for the talents that people have in their ability and their willingness to share them. And to help us.

[4 : 30] And we also thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit. And we pray that he would enable us to understand your word.

That your word would be like music to us. That it would encourage us, motivate us.

It would cause us to look upon Christ in a fresh way. That we may see him and know him. And understand him better.

So, we pray for your help in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we live in a music addicted and a song saturated world.

It's incorporated into every aspect of our life. We get it at weddings and funerals. We use it for personal reflection.

[5 : 29] Or even in public celebration. It's everywhere. Music and song is a powerful medium. A song can stir emotion and fire passion.

A piece of music can make us laugh or cause us to cry. And together, they bring back memories and they fuel our imagination. Music and singing is very much a part of our culture as people.

And it's also very much a part of church culture. In the Bible, there are over 400 references to singing. In fact, we are commanded to sing over 50 times.

For example, in Psalm 47, verse 6, it says this. Sing praises to God. Sing praises. Sing praises to our King.

Sing praises. And in case we didn't get what he was trying to communicate. He says, for God is the King of all the earth. Sing to him a psalm of praise. And then in our text in Colossians 3, it says we are to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

[6 : 47] So, in our gathering on a Sunday morning, we want to take time to sing. Now, that might seem straightforward for us because we do it all the time, but music and singing has become quite divisive.

In fact, it's been very divisive right the way down through the centuries. People choose the church they go to on the basis of the music, whether it's traditional or contemporary.

Churches even divide over the use of instruments, whether it's an organ or an electric guitar. In my readings up about this, when the organ first came into churches, into the great big cathedrals, people said that it ruined the worship service.

They didn't want any music. In fact, some people said that they weren't going to have any music at all. They could all sing their hymn in whichever tune they wanted as a sign of the Spirit working through them.

So, you sing whatever tune you wanted. So, over the centuries and even now, it's had a lot of different effects. After all, we all have our own taste, our own style, and our own flavour.

[8 : 05] Now, I find all that quite strange. The text here in Colossians, that is commanding us to sing, starts with this. Look at verse 15.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Since as members of one body, as one people, one family, you were called to peace.

So, our singing ought to be an expression of our gathering together to express our unity in Jesus Christ. So, rather than be divisive, it should be an expression of our unity.

The problem is, I think, we have become influenced by the world's view of music, rather than God's word on music.

So, what we need to do this morning is to hear what God has to say about singing primarily in our gatherings together. So, we're going to look at three things this morning.

[9 : 09] Why we sing, what we sing, and how we sing. Why we sing, what we sing, and how we sing. We're going to start with why we sing. The text gives us two reasons why we should sing, and they're both found in verse 16.

In fact, most of what we're going to say this morning comes from verse 16. Let's read it. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

So, we are to sing to one another, and we are to sing to God. So, first, we sing in response to God. Look at verse 16, the end there.

It says, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. It's very often the praise, or what some people call the worship time, is seen as something that we are doing for God.

In other words, when we start singing and when the instruments are being played, somehow we are bringing God into our presence through our singing. Or that through our songs, somehow we are entering into God's presence.

[10 : 34] So, you might hear people say, well, I didn't really get into God's presence until about the third song or so. Then I really felt his presence. Now, that's just simply wrong.

Because singing is our response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. It is primarily a response. Look back to 1 Chronicles chapter 16.

Where's that? Where's that? It's on page 420. Okay? 420. 1 Chronicles chapter 16. Keep your finger in Colossians.

Go to 1 Chronicles chapter 16. It's on page 420. So here the Levites, or the priests, as they were called, were appointed to lead people into God's presence through sacrifice and through song.

So, verse 1 of chapter 16 of 1 Chronicles. They brought the ark of God. The ark of God was a symbol or a sign of God's presence amongst the people.

[11 : 53] So they brought, if you like, the presence of God and set it inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And they prepared, or they presented, burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.

They made their sacrifices before God so that they could come into his presence. And verse 4. He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord.

To make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel. Asaph was the chief. Zechariah 2nd and then J.E.L. Then Sherimoth, Jehiel, Metathiah, Aliab, Benaniah, Obed-Edom, Jehiel.

They were to play the harps and the lyres. Asaph was to sound the cymbals. Benaniah and Jehaziel, the priests, were to blow the trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God, before his presence.

So, you see, their sacrifices and all their singing was a means of bringing the presence of God, preparing the people to bring the presence of God among the people, so that they could know God was there.

[13 : 10] Now, when we get to the New Testament, Jesus fulfills and he replaces the old system.

Very often we see that people just kind of take a passage like that and they say, right, okay, instead of the priests and the Levites, we have worship leaders. And instead of all the sacrifices, we've got songs.

And that's the way into the presence of God. Well, look at Colossians chapter 1, verse 19. Colossians 1, verse 19.

We're told here, chapter 1, verse 19, that God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus. So the presence of God is no longer now found in a temple or in a tent or anywhere else like that.

It is found in Jesus, all of God in Jesus. Verse 20. And through Jesus to reconcile to himself all things.

[14 : 15] Verse 21. Once we were alienated from God. We were enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior. In other words, we were outside of his presence.

But now, verse 22, he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you wholly in his sight, in his presence, without blemish and free from accusation, if you continue in your faith.

So through Jesus' death on the cross, we are united or reconciled to God. It's Jesus' once and for all sacrifice that brings us into God's presence.

And the good news of that is, look at verse 27. We'll read the whole verse, but we'll get to the key phrase. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery.

And here's the key phrase. Which is Christ in you. The hope of glory. Christ in you. So Jesus is already present with us.

[15 : 28] Not only with us. In fact, the presence of God is in us through our faith in Christ. So singing is not the way into the presence of God.

Jesus is. And music is not the way to bring God down to us. Jesus is. So you say, well, what about singing then?

Well, when we sing, it's in response to what God has done for us in Jesus. So in chapter 3, verse 16, we're encouraged to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Jesus, by his grace, enables us to come to God individually or corporately. And in response, we sing full of gratitude.

We often refer to the singing time as the worship time. But worship in the Bible is not just confined to singing.

[16 : 30] It includes it, but it incorporates all of life. Everything that we do throughout the week. So when we come across the word worship in the Bible, it means to submit, to honour, to bow down, to serve.

These kinds of words, they're all response words. They're in response to someone. So when we come together to sing, we express our submission, our devotion in response to what God has done.

When we sing, we're renewing our trust and our loyalty in response to God's amazing grace and his mercy to us. When we're singing, we're singing to God because we want to thank him and to show him how much we love him.

So first, we sing in response to God. Second, we sing to encourage each other. Look at the first part of verse 16.

It says we are to teach and admonish one another with all wisdom as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. So the instruction is clear there, isn't it?

[17 : 45] We are to teach and admonish or instruct each other as we sing to each other. Our singing isn't some private individual experience just between me and God, me and God connecting and, well, it doesn't matter about anybody else.

No, it's a corporate time of encouragement. So maybe you never thought of this. When I'm singing, I'm encouraging you.

I'm actually singing to you. I'm serenading to you. Isn't that nice? Not because I have a beautiful voice. I don't stand beside me. You know, I can't keep tune at all.

I sing because I want to remind you of all that God has done for you. And when you sing, we're wanting to remind each other how much God loves us, how much he cares for you, how much he has done that he's died for you.

When I go to watch Munster play, one of the songs that they'll sing, all the crowd, is the fields of Athenri. It's become, if you like, the anthem of the Munster team.

[18 : 52] And when the team are down, if they're on their back foot, that the crowd will get together. Somebody will start the song somewhere and everybody will join in. And a voice of 25,000 people joining together to encourage their team on.

Now, we might be playing rugby this morning, but we all need to keep encouragement. We all need encouragement to keep going. We need to be reminded of what God has done.

We need that encouragement. That Christ has actually won the victory. He has stepped onto the pitch for us. He has played against the other side, the enemy.

And he's secured the victory for us. So look at Colossians chapter 2, verse 13. Halfway into verse 13 of Colossians 2.

It says that God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code. With its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us.

[20 : 03] He took it away and he nailed it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities of Satan and all his dealings. He made a public spectacle of them.

Triumphing them over them by the cross. Victorious. This is our anthem. This is our music. This is the song that we need to hear as we stand shoulder to shoulder, part of the same team, supporting and encouraging each other on in the Christian life.

Because we all know it is hard to walk it alone. But we need to walk together, singing to each other, to encourage each other along in the Christian life.

So when we sing, there are two reasons. One is vertical. We sing to God in response to what God has done for us in Christ. That's the vertical.

Then the other is the horizontal. We sing to each other. We stand together to remind each other of what God has done for us in Christ.

[21 : 14] Don't worry about whether you're tuneful or not. We're singing those words of encouragement. So that's why we sing. What about what do we sing?

Because we've all got our favourites when it comes to singing. Some like the old traditional hymns. That's me. You can't beat a song with about ten lines in it and about eight verses long.

Brilliant. No? Some like a slow tempo. Some prefer contemporary songs. That's lively and fast and kind of get you going.

We've all got our particular tastes and styles. So what should we sing when we gather together? Well, verse 16 again tells us that we're to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

Which I think is referring to the whole range of music and song that is out there. God is the creator. He is the giver of wonderful gifts of music and singing.

[22 : 17] So it's not confined to just hymns or just choruses or just this or just that or fast or slow. He's given us a whole range of music. So our singing, I think, when we gather together should reflect both traditional and contemporary, fast, slow.

It should represent the whole range of what God has given to us. But more importantly, and this is where our focus should be, and this is primary, is the content of our songs.

Again, look at verse 16, the beginning of verse 16. It says, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom as you sing.

You see, it's the word of Christ, the gospel, the good news of Jesus, that is to direct the content of our songs.

That's what makes our songs at our gathering different to every other song that we sing. We could sing, couldn't we? Remember one?

[23 : 30] Look for a safe place, the safe cross code. That's instruction, isn't it? But we're not here to sing about that. We want the word of Christ to shape our songs.

That's the kind of instruction that we need. We want songs that say something to us, that teach us. So we want songs like, Oh, to see the dawn.

Listen to this line from this song. Christ became sin for us. Took the blame. Bore the wrath. We stand forgiven at the cross.

So much packed in there to instruct us. Propitiation. Expiation. Don't worry. Wonderful words. But this is what it's about.

Christ dying for us. Christ forgiving us. Christ dealing with that wrath. Or what about before the throne of God above? Here's another line.

[24 : 30] Behold him there, the risen lamb. My perfect spotless righteousness. His righteousness given to me. One with himself.

I cannot die. These words instruct us. They encourage us. They lift us up. Songs have always played an important part in Irish culture.

Stories are told and history is communicated through song. So we've got a great tradition of ballads. Where they were sung to each generation. Adults to their children.

Reminding them of the stories of the past. Of the great famine. Or of the uprising. All communicated and passed on through song. Well in the same way our singing.

To one another. Is to sing the story of Jesus Christ. A much greater story. A much greater history. And through our song we're telling each other the story again and again.

[25 : 37] We're driving home the truths that are going to keep us and sustain us through the week. And motivate us afresh to serve him. We sing the story to one another of what Christ has done.

Our faithful and loving God. So that's why we sing. That's what we sing. But what about how we sing?

Well we kind of looked at that just now didn't we? We fill our lungs with air and we. That's good. We need to do that to sing. But that's not really what we're getting at here. We think it's just maybe easy to get up and start singing.

Well not really. If we want the songs that we sing to have a lasting effect in our lives. We need to learn how to sing. If we want the truths of Jesus that we sing about to change us and to transform us.

We need to do more than just stand up and open our mouths. There's a whole lot more going on and involved in our singing. Three things and these are all by way of application to try and drive home the point, the importance of how we sing.

[26 : 52] First of all, we sing with our minds. When we sing, our focus is the person and the character of Jesus.

Not the worship experience. In other words, when we come together we don't leave our minds outside and just let the moment take over.

We want to know more of who Jesus is. We want to understand him more so that we know how to respond to him better. So verse 16 says, Let the word of Christ dwell in you.

Individually and corporately. Let it dwell in you richly. Let it sink deep. Let God's word go right down into your life. The word of Christ is going to inform us.

It's going to shape us and it's going to direct us and mould us into the people that we should be. So our desire when we're singing is to understand Christ better.

[27 : 58] To comprehend all that he has done. And who I am now. How Christ sees me now because of that. So this truth is a truth that engages our minds.

We have to think about it. Very often the worship time as it's called is all hyped up by loud music. Heavy beats and endless repetition.

Not saying that it's wrong. But that's what it can be. But that kind of singing and kind of getting lost there doesn't involve the mind. There's no thinking involved. Emotion is not going to change anybody.

It will give you a nice feeling. But it's never going to last. What did Jesus say in his word? A worship experience will set you free.

No, he says the truth is what will set you free. So we need to engage our minds with the truth of the gospel.

[29 : 00] So that's the first thing. When we sing we've got to bring our minds. And now I know you're thinking there saying, He doesn't like emotion. He doesn't like the heart. Ah, next point.

We need to sing with our heart. Okay. The heart in the Bible is the seat of our emotion and our experience. So when we sing, look at the end of verse 16.

Sing with psalms, hymns, spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart to God. In fact, the corresponding passage, which is fairly similar in Ephesians 5, says this.

Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord. So our hearts are to be involved. We don't leave them outside either. We bring our minds in and we bring our hearts in.

Our emotions are to be engaged with what we're singing. Yes, emotion by itself is not going to change us or transform us.

[30 : 02] But emotion that is directed by the truth will make what Jesus has done a reality deep within your life. Involving the heart as we sing magnifies the truth.

It lifts it up higher and greater. It doesn't replace the truth, but it makes it greater. When we sing and involve our hearts, it's like a massive magnifying glass over it that kind of just lifts it out for us.

In Mark 7, verse 6, Jesus says, These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

We can stand and sing with our lips, but our hearts can be very far away. Intellectually, we can have it all.

We can understand. We could write down on a piece of paper everything about justification and sanctification and glorification and all these wonderful things. And we have all the information up here. But in the heart, it's not there.

[31 : 09] Experientially, Jesus doesn't have anything to do with you day to day. There's nothing. Emptiness. Coldness. You see, it's not enough just to know the truth with our minds.

We've also got to treasure Jesus with our hearts. To desire him. To love him. The Psalms. Read through the Psalms.

Full of emotion. As people express their joy and their thanks. Their pain and their hurts. Their longing and their desires.

So we shouldn't be afraid of emotion when we sing. Tears of repentance. Tears of happiness.

Shouts of joy. Cries of doubt. The whole range of emotion is there when we come to God. So, we involve the heart as we engage with God.

[32 : 14] So we sing with our mind. We sing with our hearts. And we also sing with our bodies. Now, that's a good question to ask, isn't it?

How do we express ourselves when we sing? What do we do with our bodies? I mean, yep, lips, got that thing. But the rest of us. Because there's more of the body there than just the mouth.

So, what do we do with it? Do we dance? Do we kind of run up and down the aisle all excited and hop around the place? What do we do? Do we raise our hands?

Do we lay prostrate on the ground? Do we lay prostrate on the ground? Do we lay prostrate on the ground? Well, the Bible talks about the need for order when we gather together.

We see that in Corinthians. So, when we gather together, it's not a free-for-all to do whatever we like and to behave as we want. It must be appropriate and respectful.

[33 : 12] As we mentioned earlier, worship in the Bible means to submit, to bow down, to honour, to serve.

They're all response words. And they all give us something of how perhaps we should use our bodies in response to God. And I think it's orderly and appropriate to respond with our bodies.

Our physical actions express what we think and believe. Don't they? If you've got an emotion, you don't just kind of say, I love you.

I might do that, but I'm trying to learn, trying to be a bit more expressive. No, I say, I love you. And give her a big hug. I think. So, our physical actions express what we think and believe.

It helps us to affirm what we're trying to say and what we're communicating, what's on our minds and on our hearts. So, let me suggest two physical expressions that I think are helpful, may be helpful to you.

[34 : 27] It's not enforced. But what might be helpful as we sing? Both of which are appropriate, respectful, and orderly. The first might be the obvious one.

Our hands. What do we do with our hands? I've got to be careful using my hands because I'm not wearing a jumper today, okay? Don't look. Okay? But lifting our hands can express honour and praise.

Can't they? We can say, yeah, praise the Lord. Great God. Or we can praise the Lord. Our physical actions express what we are saying.

Delight. But also service. As we hold out our hands, it's an action of, I am here to serve you. I am here sacrificing my life, giving my life to you.

To live for you and you alone. So, I think we can use our hands. Of course, we have to be careful that we're not kind of blocking the screen for everybody.

[35 : 34] Maria. I'm only joking. So, we just have to be careful, don't we? But it's the use of our hands in how we praise God.

How we offer our service and our sacrifice. The second is bowing down or kneeling. Okay? We might be a little bit more confined in the rows that we have.

But certainly sitting down and kneeling down and bowing down, it expresses repentance. If we are genuinely repentant.

We kneel before our great King, the Creator of the universe. An act of humility and submission as we bow to our King.

And you'll be thinking, well, I ain't going to do that. What is somebody going to think? Well, it's not about other people. It's about us responding to God.

[36 : 37] It's about us responding to God. With our praise. With our thanksgiving. Raising our hands if we wish to. Kneeling down. Bowing down if we need to. Doing something physical helps enforce what is on our minds and what is in our hearts.

So how we sing is very important. Our singing addresses the mind. It engages the heart.

And it involves the body. We are created intellectually, emotionally, physical beings. And together they affirm the truth of God.

They deepen the work of God in our lives. And they reinforce our response to God. You think about your own relationships.

If you're married. Your husband or to your wife.