

The Christocentric Resonance of Singing Together

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Date: 26 May 2024

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[0:01] All right, so if we haven't met, my name is Zach. I'm the associate pastor of worship here at Christ the King Church. I would normally be doing what Ethan was just doing this morning.

And Ethan, thank you so much for leading. So appreciate you. Worship team, love getting to serve with you guys. They are a wonderful group, and it's a joy to serve Sunday in, Sunday out with them, lifting up the name of Christ.

So that's what I normally do on a Sunday, but Mike experienced a bit of a brief lapse in judgment and asked if I would be willing to preach this Sunday.

And it's going to be, we're going to be looking at Colossians 3.16. So we've been in this sermon series called Christ Central on the book of Colossians, and there is this gem packed in there that's one of the more well-known verses on worship, on corporate worship, and we are going to be digging into that as a church this morning.

I'm very excited to be doing that with you all this morning. So if you'd open up your Bibles, we're going to go to Colossians chapter 3. If you are using your Pew Bible, that's going to be page 1170, 1170 in your Pew Bible.

[1:16] And we're actually going to be starting in verse 12 because the context that surrounds this verse is important. So we want to get at that and keep that in view as we're going through looking at this text, okay?

So Colossians chapter 3, verse 12. God's word says this. God's word says this.

Put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. We just sang about that. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful.

Here's our verse. 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.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. So Colossians 3, that's the context in which this Colossians 3, verse is dropped on us.

[2:57] And the context of this is important. What Paul has been saying throughout this is essentially put off your old self, right? It's that put off your grave clothes and put on instead the new self, that you have been clothed in Christ.

This is the reality that Paul wants us to keep in the forefront of our minds and at the forefront of our lives. This is what we saw last week, right? With baptism, it is a picture of this, that the old you is dead, buried, and you have been raised to new life with Christ.

So be who you already are, right? That you are living out of that identity. You've been made new, so live like you have been made new.

And that living happens primarily in the context of the local church, which for us is right here, Christ the King Church. And with these people that we have locked arms with, that we have committed to in love.

And this does not always look easy because you get a bunch of sinners together and you have them do life together and there's going to be sin. That happens, right?

[4:14] That's just part of it. And yet we are called to bear with one another. We're called to have patience with one another, to love each other, to forgive, to go to others seeking forgiveness.

That's where this gets lived out. And as that happens, that's where that Christocentric resonance that Mike has been pointing us to for the past few weeks, that's where that happens. So this little gem on corporate worship is given to us in the context of our local church.

When we raise our voices in singing praises to our God, we are doing that with other blood-bought brothers and sisters in Christ.

And seeing that, what that should do is elevate for us the value of gathering together to sing praises to God.

Okay? So just to give a comparative picture of this, when I was in my late teens, early 20s, I wanted to be something of a music critic of the classic rock and roll genre.

[5:23] So your Bob Dylan, your Bruce Springsteen, your Beatles. I wanted to know their discography really well so that I could basically look down on people that listen to Nickelback and stuff like that.

It was not a super sanctified period in my life. So I was aspiring to this, and my dad in that time frame asked me if I wanted to go down to Chicago to see the U2 360 tour.

And U2 was one of those groups that I was like, they are awesome. And I would love to go with my dad and have this awesome concert experience, right? So we went, and it was, to this date, the most cinematic concert experience that I've ever been in.

They built, like, this weird, crazy spaceship-looking stage that the size of it was just ridiculous. And in the center, there were these concentric circles so that the band could go out and play to, like, each different part of the stadium at Soldier Field.

You had Bono over here and the Edge over here. I still remember when the Edge started his guitar lick for where the streets had no name, and everyone just goes crazy, and we're all singing. And it was really cool, but the reality is that that moment, what I experienced in that concert, does not hold a candle to what you and I just experienced within this half an hour.

[6:42] Lifting up our voices with the redeemed people of God, which is a foretaste of heaven, right? Because who are we going to be singing with for all of eternity? It's the blood-bought people of God, right?

So concert experience, super cool. You can go, maybe for you, it's Taylor Swift. Maybe it's Carnegie Hall, and that's great. But the most sacred expression of music that you can experience on this side of heaven happens right here, gathered with your brothers and sisters, lifting up praise to God.

So with that in mind, we're going to go to Colossians 3.16. And what we're going to be doing is basically looking at how this verse gives us a guide for how corporate worship operates, functions within the body of the church, in our case, Christ the King Church here in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

So I'm going to try to answer four questions as best I can. One, how does the word of Christ dwell richly in our singing? How does that happen? Two, how do we teach and admonish one another through our singing?

Three, how should we let the Psalms guide us and guide our singing? And then number four, how do we sing to God in gratitude?

[8:08] How do we get that to take root in our hearts? So those are going to be the four questions that I'm trying to unpack this morning in our sermon. So Colossians 3.16 starts with that, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Right? And it begs the question when he says that phrase, the word of Christ, what does Paul mean by that? Does he mean like the actual words of Jesus, scripture?

Is that like John 6.63 where Jesus says, it is the spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Or John 2.22, when therefore he, Jesus, was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered that he had said this. And they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

So is he talking about the words of scripture or is he using it more in a gospel message context? The New Testament uses that phrase, the word, as a phrase for the gospel. Like in 1 Corinthians 1.18, Paul says, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

[9:21] Or earlier in Colossians chapter 1.5, he writes, Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing.

So word of Christ is that primarily referring to scripture or primarily referring to the gospel. And I would say, yes, that it is both. That what Paul has in mind is that we would be both a people of the book and that we would be a gospel people.

Right? That it's both of those things. So if the word of Christ is dwelling in us richly as scripture, there's already, before we even start singing, there's already a lot of ways in which that happens. Right? Just reading it, that we should be in our Bibles, get our noses in our Bibles. Right? We're reading, we're meditating on it, we're seeking to memorize it. We are sharing what we are learning with our brothers and sisters.

We're listening to them, we're asking them questions about what they're learning, the word dwelling in us richly. We're coming here on a Sunday morning and we're listening to the faithful preaching of God's word week in and week out.

[10:35] Read good books, listen to good podcasts. There's so many ways that we can have the word of Christ dwelling in us richly. But it also dwells richly in our singing, or at least it's supposed to.

Right? Right? So when we sing songs with lyrics like, Jesus the name above every other name. What that should remind us of is Philippians 2, 8 through 9.

Therefore God has highly exalted him, Jesus, and bestowed on him the name that is above every other name. And when we sing, Jesus the only one who could ever save, we should have Acts 4, 12 ping in our brains.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. This is why I love songs like In Christ Alone, where you take any phrase of that song, it is just a hyperlink back to the word of God.

Right? That's the kind of stuff that we want to be singing. Because these words right here, this book, this Bible, this is what we know, this is what we know has been breathed out by God.

[11:53] Right? This is where we know beyond a shadow of a doubt where God is speaking. So we want to sing lyrics that are saturated in his metaphors.

And in his commands and his poetry and his promise and his truth. If our songs are anchored in this book, then the word of God is going to dwell richly.

Right? But it's also the gospel dwelling richly among us, which is why we sing songs with lyrics like this. The mystery of the cross I cannot comprehend.

The agonies of Calvary. You, the perfect holy one, crushed your son and drank the bitter cup reserved for me.

Your blood has washed away my sin. Jesus, thank you. We never, and I mean never, outgrow the need to be reminded of the gospel.

[13:03] We need to be reminded of our sin. We need to be reminded of our desperate need for rescue. We live in a culture that is very materialistic and consumeristic and naturalistic.

And it's very performance based. Those are the waters that we are swimming in. And it makes it so easy to be blinded to the all sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

And so we need songs that are pressing us into the, that are just washing over us with the reality of the gospel. That is something that we need.

And then just a side note here. The word dwelling richly, that is not something that happens. It's something that happens over time as well.

Right? That it's something that we're letting these songs grow over us in a sense. So if you're a kid, let's just say that you're a kid at Christ the King Church.

[14:04] We've got the kids with us this morning. And you grow up in this church. And you get saved here. You become a member here. And God in his goodness has you commit to the city of Kenosha for the rest of your life.

And you just live out your time here through life, highs and lows. When you get into your 80s, we should still be singing at least some of the songs that you were singing back in high school.

And some of the songs that you were singing when you got married and had kids and went through trials over time. We have a culture that wants to just replace things really quickly.

We want it new. We want it now. And that's not what we want to do with our songs. We want to kind of marinate in these over time so that we can sing these songs robustly without having to take out

our phones every time to look at the lyrics.

So as we do that, as we sing scripture-saturated, gospel-centered songs, there's something special. That's going to end up happening, which is that we're going to end up teaching one another.

[15:16] So the NIV, this is my second question. How do we teach and admonish one another through our singing? The NIV makes explicit what I think that the Apostle Paul is doing here.

The NIV translates it as teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

That we teach and admonish one another through our singing. And this is a category that I don't think that we think of all that often.

The idea of singing to teach and learn from one another. Matt Merker, he's got this great book on corporate worship, appropriately titled Corporate Worship.

I strongly recommend it. It's very good. He has this line. He says this, When you become a church member, you also become a Sunday school teacher.

[16:13] By opening your mouth in congregational singing. Which is a beautiful reminder that when we gather to sing praises to God, there is, of course, this awesome vertical dimension, of course, to our praise.

We are fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ. This is ultimately about him. Right? But there's also this horizontal dimension to it.

That if we are singing songs that are true to God's word, we're singing songs that are filled with good theology, that are filled with the gospel. Then every time that we sing together on a Sunday morning, that we are going to be proclaiming God's truth to one another.

Right? And we're listening to those around us also affirming that truth. There is a teaching element that's going on in the songs that we're singing.

And we can hear each other. And we can sing each other. Which, by the way, is one of the reasons that I really like this space. Is that we can actually see each other.

[17:19] If we wanted to, we could go to some great lengths and put shades on these windows. And it could be really dark in here. And have probably more of a concert vibe. We could do that. But I'm not sure that that would be the wisest thing.

So here's what I have in mind when I say that. When you're singing on a Sunday, you look over and you see a sister in Christ who is going through some financial hardship.

Some significant financial hardship. You know that times are tough. Money is tight. There is probably stress there. You know what's going on in this sister's life because you do life with this person.

But then you look over and you see her singing with all of her heart, riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise.

Thou mine inheritance, now and always. And you see her singing that. That's going to impress something on your heart. Right?

[18:24] Or you look over at a brother in Christ who has unexpectedly lost a loved one. And you know that he is walking through pain.

That there are some deep waters that he is going through. And yet you look over and you see him singing with tears in his eyes. When peace like a river attendeth my way.

When sorrows like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say. It is well.

It is well with my soul. And in singing with him, you are learning something from him.

And the church is also encouraging and calling him to remember that reality that even in his circumstances, yes and amen, that this is true. It can be well with your soul through the darkest waters.

[19:26] And what I hope that does is it convicts us a little bit that there's really no place for half-hearted singing when we gather.

Because your family needs you singing in strength. Because there's an encouraging work that happens when we do that.

Right? So he doesn't just say teaching. He also says admonishing one another. So that's a little bit of a strong word. That means rebuke or warn.

You go, I don't know if I like the idea of being warned while I'm worshipping. But he says it right there. So what this is reminding us of is that we should expect encouragement.

But we don't only expect encouragement when we sing. That we also expect the Holy Spirit to be doing a sanctifying work in us. Right? We expect him to wake us up to our sin.

[20:26] So we'll flip this around. Let's say that maybe you're the one that's experiencing some financial difficulty. Okay? So times are tough. And you are struggling to sing with the church words like this.

I rejoice in my Redeemer. Greatest treasure. Wellspring of my soul. I will trust in him. No other. My soul is satisfied in him alone.

And maybe just singing those words exposes something in you. That right now you're setting your heart more on financial security than you're setting your heart on Christ.

And the voices around you are calling you to the truth that Jesus is better than financial security. And you hear them singing.

And by God's grace hopefully there's a repenting work that happens. So that you can sing joyfully. And sing like Jesus is better. Puts those words.

[21:31] Make my heart believe. Right? And you can get to that place. That's the hope. So we admonish one another in our singing as well. Okay. So the word dwells in us richly.

We teach and admonish one another through singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. So how do the psalms guide our singing? We have that phrase, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs.

This is a unique phrase in the New Testament. There's only one other place that it shows up, which is Ephesians 5.19, which says the same thing. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. There is some disagreement on exactly what these three words are getting at.

Are each of these like a separate category of a type of song? What everyone agrees with, and if you look really closely at the text, I think that you'll see it there.

When Paul says to sing psalms, he means to sing psalms. Like from the Old Testament, right, from the book of Psalms. So that's what he has in mind there.

[22:37] And then we get into hymns and spiritual songs. And I would say that those two phrases, what they allow us to do is to sing songs that are still Scripture-saturated, that are still gospel-focused, and that we can faithfully, by God's grace, write.

And Christians have been writing over the past 2,000 years songs that help us get at that, right? And we should sing those too. I think that's what he has in mind. But the fact that Paul says psalms in particular means that we should be, it would be wise for us to look back at the book of Psalms and use that as a guide.

So we not only sing some of the psalms, which we do with some songs, like we have a song that's based very closely on Psalm 96 or the song Glorious and Mighty. Those are attached very closely. You can compare them, bring out your Bible, look at how close those are. But we also use the psalms to help us know what we're supposed to sing when we gather as a church.

So if you open up the book of Psalms later this afternoon, here's some of the things that you're going to see. You're going to see short psalms, like Psalm 100, which is five verses.

[23:53] You're going to see longer psalms, like Psalm 68, which is like 35 verses, something like that. You're going to see psalms of repentance, like Psalm 51 with words like this.

You're going to see songs of joyful adoration, like Psalm 67.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Celebration, excitement over who God is and what he's doing.

Right? That needs to be there. You're going to see psalms of lament, like Psalm 13, which says, How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? That's in your Bible. So what the psalms do is they give the people of God a breadth and a depth of emotion and language and circumstances with God at the center of it all.

[25:14] And they encourage us to seek the joyful gift of God's presence in worship. And they also invite us to press into sorrow and to lament and repentance.

That there's an emotional breadth across this. That we have a language for worshiping God on the mountaintop and through the valley. Both of those things.

And the point of it all is that we would delight in our Savior. And that we would glorify God in our singing.

At the end of the day, that is what we are after. Because if we don't have that, then all of our singing is like filthy rags. Paul says that our singing must be done with thankfulness in our hearts to God.

So that begs the question, how does that kind of thankfulness make its way into our hearts? Right? So Paul has already helped us a little bit with answering this question.

[26:30] If you go back just a little bit in Colossians to chapter 1. You're going to see Colossians 1.12. Where Paul is talking about how Christians walk in a manner that is pleasing to God.

And he says a manner that we are pleasing to God is by giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you. So this is the God that we're giving thanks to.

The Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness.

And has transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. In whom we have redemption. The forgiveness of sins. So gratitude happens when we see that we once belonged to the domain of darkness.

That we acknowledge that. That we recognize that our sin had separated us to the point that if we stood before God. The only thing that we would qualify for would be eternal separation from him.

[27:45] In hell. Forever. That's where we were. Ephesians 2 says that we were children of wrath. That's where we were before Jesus Christ. It comes when we see that.

But then when we also see the depth of the Father's love for us in Christ. Who has not left us to our sin. But has ransomed us.

He has rescued us. Forgiven us. Redeemed us. He has transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. Not because we're good. But because he's good.

Right? Not that we loved God. But that he loved us. And sent his Son to die for us. It's when we see that the record of debt that once stood against us has been set aside forever.

Nailing it to the cross. And there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Gratitude happens when we see Christ's work so clearly that we cannot help but lift up our praises to our God.

[28:56] With everything that we've got. And we just lose ourselves in his glory and his goodness. And his mercy and his value and his worth.

And we do that together as the redeemed, ransomed people of God. And that's what I want to get into our hearts.

That's the reality that I want us to be centered on when we gather to worship on a Sunday morning. That we would treasure Jesus above all else.

And that doesn't mean that every Sunday is a mountaintop experience. Because there's valleys that we're walking through as well. But that we would, through our singing, be so convinced that Jesus is worth it.

And that's when you hear the sound of Christ-o-centric resonance. Right? Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for redeeming a people.

[30:08] We thank you for rescuing us. For the glorious work that you have done, Lord Jesus, on the cross.

And for the joy set before you, you went to the cross. We ask, Holy Spirit, that you would help us to build one another up in our singing.

That you would help us to encourage each other to fix our eyes on Christ. Father, you are so good. You are so kind. Amen. We love you. It's in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.