

The Song of Our Hearts

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Colossians chapter 3. Please follow along in your bulletins or on the screen. The scripture reading comes from Colossians chapter 3.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Here, there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.

Put on them as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another.

And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all, these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

[1 : 59] And let the peace of Christ roll in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful. 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. This is the word of God.

Amen. Thank you, Betty. Church, my name is Jeremy. If you don't know me, if you're new today, I'm one of the pastoral staff here. And it's just awesome to be able to continue the series that we started last week.

We're kind of in this mini-series, just three weeks, and we're looking at why worship. Why do we gather Sunday after Sunday or week after week to gather to worship?

And last week, we looked at the source of everything that we do, Jesus Christ, and how he's called us to gather regularly as a church so that we can be washed in the gospel.

[3 : 13] You know, all the things that draw us away from the Lord throughout the week. We need to be washed again and again. And we heard about a new word that may have been invented called gospelize, that we're actually here to gospelize one another.

Not just to be passive participants sitting in a seat, you know, for two hours. But God's called every member of his family, his body, to bring the gospel to one another.

And today, we're going to actually look at a more specific aspect of worship, which is singing. And I'm really excited because usually I'm just singing, but how often do you get to preach a sermon and talk about singing?

And so on a side note, notice that I said singing is an aspect of worship. And that's something that we really try and emphasize because we want us to see the entire service, whether it's greeting, the greeting that you just did, the offering envelope that you just put into that box, the hearing of the scripture and reading it, and even listening to this sermon and applying it, all of that should be worship.

And like Kevin said last week, in fact, all of life should be worship. So we just want to emphasize that singing is one aspect of worship.

[4 : 33] But if the singing is just one aspect, why are we devoting an entire sermon on it? And that's a really good question, guys. And I think the reality is that even though we sing regularly in church, in fact, we just did it, we just sang three songs, it's actually, I think it could be quite uniquely misunderstood.

And here's what I mean. I think some of us in here have been in the church kind of context all our lives. And singing is just what you do. You saw it modeled to you.

That's what you've just been taught to do and shown to do since you were young. And for maybe some of you, singing is just natural. That's just what you do.

You wake up with a song like a Disney movie or, you know, my wife notices, you know, at home, like I just will kind of, whatever I'm doing, I might just, I just kind of randomly turn that into like a jingle or a little thing.

Like even if I'm just washing the dishes, I might be kind of singing like, I'm washing the dishes, scrub, scrub, scrub, you know, something like that. Some of you guys, the song just, it just comes out.

[5 : 37] You guys are just inherently musical for one reason or another. But when it comes to a church gathering, do we know biblically, theologically, why do we actually sing?

And then for some of us, you know, if you're a new Christian or today you're not a Christian and you're just seeking and you're trying to figure this out, this would be kind of weird, right?

This idea of a whole bunch of people gathering together and singing out loud. And you're saying to me, hey, I can talk. I can even talk to someone.

I can listen to a talk. I can listen to music on my Spotify. But man, singing is just not something I normally do. It just doesn't feel natural to you.

And I get that. I get that. I think I feel that way sometimes, too. And then for some of you, if you're honest, you hate singing, right? You get that Facebook event of invite for a birthday karaoke and you just cannot hit decline fast enough, right?

[6 : 45] Or you hit maybe if you're trying to be a little more passive and not make a big fuss like I sometimes do. And some of us, we know, if we're honest, we're just terrible singers in a technical sense.

We couldn't hold a tune to save our lives. And maybe you're self-conscious of that today. And I used to be self-conscious about that, too. I sometimes still am. Some of us, we just don't really get singing.

Like, okay, I can understand why some people sing, but I'm just not inclined to do it. And so if you're skeptical about singing today, as much as I value your feelings and your opinions, as a church, we want to actually get back to what God says, right?

We want to get back to what God's Word says about singing. And even if you've studied this topic before, you know, I think it's pretty rare that we actually get to look at this as a church in a sermon. So I think we need to probably be reminded. So let's kind of dig in into the passage that Betty just read for us. And when we look at today's passage, it's really crystal clear that it ends with a command to sing.

[7 : 55] Verse 16. So what we're going to do for the remainder of this sermon is to look at some of the reasons for this command and actually how that applies to us.

And there's no kind of single passage of Scripture that gives us like the A's to Z's of singing. But this little verse in Colossians is a real gem and it's a really good framework.

And it'll be like our springboard to go into other passages of Scripture. So let's take a stab at this.

And when you look at the whole Bible in terms of what it says about singing and what it says about song, one thing that you'll notice really quickly, that singing begins with God.

And that's our first main point for today. Singing begins with God. Now if you've even looked through a Bible kind of in passing, you'll notice there's a huge book called the Psalms, which itself is actually a collection of five books, 150 songs that were divinely inspired by God.

And by one person's analysis, there are around almost 50 direct commands to sing in the Bible, in God's Word, and around 400 references to singing.

[9 : 28] But the singing that the Bible talks about isn't just, you know, singing gibberish or making random noises, but actually it's something that's deeply rooted in a relationship with God.

God's view of singing is that it's born out of a relationship with Him. And so as we were reminded last week, God is the source of everything.

You see this in the entire book of Colossians. You know, Colossians was basically a letter about Jesus Christ. And Paul is saying that Jesus is, He's God, and He's superior to all human traditions and philosophies, all the things we want to worship.

God and Jesus is greater than all of that. And so you get to chapter 3, Paul writes this. You have been raised in, you've been raised with Christ.

You have been raised with Christ. We were spiritually dead, separated from our Creator. But Christ came to us. He died for our sins.

[10 : 35] And He was raised back to life, showing that He had conquered death. So followers of Jesus today, we are raised to life with Him.

We are given eternal life. And when you get to our key verse, verse 16, it also starts with this. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. Christ has raised us from the dead, and now we have Christ's Word dwelling in us.

And singing always begins with God, with His Word, with Christ's Word in us. But the cool thing is that it's not just that singing begins with God in kind of some abstract way.

But did you know that the Bible also says that God actually sings Himself? In Zephaniah 3.17, we read this.

[11 : 38] The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will quiet you by His love. He will exult over you with loud singing. That word exult basically means to rejoice.

And the context of this verse is the restoration of God's people. So God's people in Israel in the Old Testament, God had called them to be His people, His sons and daughters.

But they had rejected Him. They had ran away. But He loved them so much, and He found them, and He gathered them back to Him. And now this verse is saying that God is exulting over them and singing.

And I was trying to think to myself, maybe what's something that can capture that feeling that we read here? And I think a lot of us can remember a time when we got lost from our parents as a kid.

[12 : 42] Hopefully not as an adult, but as a kid. But if you remember that fear and that terror that you felt, that, gosh, you don't know if you're going to see your family again.

As far as you know, you were on your own. And how did they react when they found you? Maybe some of you guys, your parents actually yelled at you for being careless.

But I think more often than not, for my parents, man, they were just beaming. They were just so relieved, so thankful. That I had been found.

And it wasn't because I was great or I'd done anything great that they're like, yes, I found this money bank or whatever. But they just were excited because their son was found.

Maybe some of you guys can resonate more with, like, if you're a parent, I can imagine just holding your newborn for the first time. They haven't done anything for you.

[13 : 39] They just exist. They're probably inconveniencing you, right? Or the first time you welcome your adopted son or daughter home. I feel like that kind of captures that emotion.

And Jesus tells a story in the Bible, actually, about a son who was lost. A prodigal. And he wasn't just lost accidentally. He didn't just kind of accidentally wander off.

The son basically told his dad, Dad, you're dead to me. Give me my inheritance. I'm going to go do my own thing. And he ran away. And he kind of wasted all his money and his livelihood on frivolous, stupid things.

And finally he realizes, through many ups and downs, that, man, how stupid have I been? My father's servants have a better life than me.

Why don't I just kind of go back and see if my dad will take me back as a servant? And so he finally makes his way back home. And his father sees him from a distance. And he just runs to him.

[14 : 42] An undignified thing to do. And he puts on this amazing party and celebration. And he's exalting over him. And church, that's a story that just comes to my mind when I imagine, how is God feeling?

What does it mean that he's exalting and rejoicing over us? For those of us who have come back to God, who we've come back home to God this morning, you'd say, yeah, I'm a believer.

I'm a follower of Jesus. Have you thought and have you kind of stopped and thought, what does it mean that God actually rejoices over you in singing?

That really how delighted he is to have you in his family. He doesn't tolerate you. He doesn't just see you as a project of self-improvement.

He loves you and rejoices over you when you have absolutely nothing to offer. For those of us who maybe you've been wandering, maybe you've wandered from home like that prodigal, maybe it's

been a few days, maybe your whole life has been running away from God, do you know this morning that the one who created the universe is longing to rejoice over you in singing?
[16:11] who wants to gather you back home? How he loves you. Oh, how he loves you. Some of you hear this and it makes sense because maybe in your upbringing, you actually got a lot of love and affirmation from your parents.

But for those of you who maybe you didn't experience that growing up, this sounds like foreign to you. I just want to remind you that God is not like any human parents. He's totally different. He's a perfect father and a perfect parent. And he wants to be proud of you. He wants to love you. He wants to affirm you and sing over you.

Some of you hear this specifically about singing, and it makes sense because maybe even your parents, maybe they sang lullabies to you when you were a kid.

And you're like, okay, I get it. God sings over me. Some of you, maybe like me, you never really heard that or had that experience growing up, and you're like, okay, I really understand.

[17:19] I'm getting the fact that God is rejoicing over me. He loves me. He's like a father. He is a father to me. But why does he have to sing? Why can't he just kind of pat me on the back or say, you know, I love you, son, or anything?

Why can't he just use normal speaking? Because that's kind of how I communicate. And if he wants to sing, fine. That's great. But then why does he want me to sing as well?

And actually, those are really good questions, church. So well done. Obviously, God uses a lot of ways to communicate. You know, we just heard his word read to us.

But I think there are at least two really important reasons that God both uses songs, and he also commands us to sing. And so the first thing is that God uses songs to uniquely help us to remember his truth.

And secondly, God uses songs to uniquely help us to engage our emotions for God and his truth. And this is our second main point today. And these two reasons are basically two sides of the same coin.

[18:32] So we're going to look at them together. It helps us to remember God and help us to engage our emotions. Now, many of us know the great story of Moses, right?

Who's heard of Moses here? Okay, half of you. Good. So for the other half, I'll recap for you. So God raises up this prince of Egypt, right? You might have even seen the cartoon.

Partially correct. But he raises up this prince of Egypt to lead his people out of captivity. And Moses becomes God's representative to the people. So he brings in the Ten Commandments.

He leads the people through the wilderness, through all their complaining and whatnot. And finally, they're at the cusp of entering the promised land that God has promised to them.

And so now, as Moses' life and his ministry draws to an end, he appoints Joshua as his successor, as the next in line, right? And he's telling Joshua, he's telling his people, hey, be strong and courageous, guys.

[19:35] Don't be afraid. Don't forget God. Choose life today by obeying God. And actually, the entire book of Deuteronomy, which is the fifth and final book of Moses, it's actually a giant recap of what's happened, of what God has done and who he is.

And so when you get to the final chapters of Deuteronomy, after all this amazing recap, Moses, as God's representative, does something really interesting. Guess what's there?

He teaches them a song. He teaches the people a song about God. And God uses a song to help his people remember who he is and to remember how to live for him.

And one of my favorite Bible verses is actually part of this song. Deuteronomy 32, 39. It says, God's voice is saying, See now that I, even I am he, and there is no God beside me.

You see what he's doing there, guys? God is saying so clearly, unequivocally, that I am God. I am my own reference point. There is nothing worth comparing.

[20:51] There is nothing that you should worship other than me. Remember that. Remember that. And honestly, if the Israelites had remembered that, I think the rest of the Old Testament would have turned out very, very differently.

Now, we could look at academic studies about how song and poetry help people memorize things better than prose or narrative.

But I think it's easier to just look at your own experience. How many of you could recite to me right now the entire sermon that you've heard before or an article that you've read?

Anyone? Anyone? Good. My illustration works then. But how many of you can actually remember the song lyrics of a song that you've sung?

Any. Christian or otherwise. Okay, Millen can. At least one. Come on. More of you can. Some whatever. Oldies, you know. I can't live if living is without you.

[21 : 54] Anything like that. But why is it? There's something about it that has captured and sunk into your memory. And I guarantee you that before you go to bed tonight, you'll have probably forgotten most of the words of this sermon.

Some of you have probably forgotten most of the words of this sermon already. And that's okay. I'm not offended because I think there is a reason for that. And you've got to deal with that between you and God.

But really, this is how our brains work. Narrative and prose just doesn't sink in as well. But I would bet good money, if I were a betting man, that tonight you'll at least remember parts of the songs that you sang.

And they might even just be kind of like swirling around in your head. And so Colossians 3.16 says this. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

And Paul connects that to singing. But it's not just that the knowledge and love of Jesus leads us to sing. But also that singing helps us to get the word of Christ to dwell in us.

[23 : 01] So it's like a reciprocal kind of back and forth relationship and dynamic. And guys, we kind of talked about this last week.

But this week you're going to go out into your jobs and your homes and into difficult situations and into your social context. And you're going to be challenged as you try and follow Jesus.

And as a Christian, you have this new identity as God's son or daughter. And that's why Colossians 3.5, Paul is calling us to put to death what is earthly and evil within us.

He says put to death all those things. Idolatry. But you know what? That's going to be hard.

Because I'm a forgetful person. I need reminders.

I need to be reminded that money and sex and power and all these things that are going to pass away on this earth they're actually not ultimate.

[24 : 00] And when I'm faced in those situations will I remember Christ, you're the center of the universe. Everything was made in you. When your boss is giving you unreasonable demands this week are you going to get angry and want to like rebel against him?

Or will you remember that, oh Christ, be the center of my life. Be the place I fix my eyes. You know, when you're running into family problems or your kids not obeying you will they be the center of your life?

Or will you say, oh Christ, you're the center. You hold everything together. When you read the news this week about the protests and the brokenness will you remember God, you hold everything together.

I don't understand. I'm not you. But I know you hold everything together. So singing helps us to remember God and his truth.

And if we stopped there though you would think that singing is really just a glorified lecture or teaching plan. But scripture makes a really clear connection too that there is emotions that must be connected to singing.

[25 : 15] James 5.13 says, Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. If you're cheerful, sing praise. So God's truth is meant to be emotional.

It's meant to elicit emotional responses from us. And you know, life is full of emotions whether you recognize it or not. Those of you guys have watched Inside Out, you know what I mean.

It's so clear. You know, a loving relationship between two people should have emotions, right? If I told you, hey, tell me about your best friend or your spouse.

And you're like, cool. Johnny is six foot tall. He's 170 pounds. He's a nice guy. He loves Jesus. He's a good guy.

He's a good friend. He's funny too. I'd be like, okay, you know some facts about Johnny. But if you were like, man, Johnny is cool. He's on fire for the Lord, man.

[26 : 18] And he just told me a story the other day. Let me tell you. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And he was just able to connect that to Jesus. Man, I just love the passion in him. You see the difference there?

It's not just information. I could even see it in your smile, in the way you communicated, that there is emotion in your relationship with Johnny, in your friendship.

Yip Harburg was the writer of a song called Somewhere Over the Rainbow. Does anyone know that song? Wizard of Oz. I'm not going to sing it. Only Ed sings in his sermon, so maybe later, Ed.

But you know, Somewhere Over the Rainbow. But he said this extremely insightful quote. He said, Words make you think a thought. Music makes you feel a feeling.

But a song makes you feel a thought. And it's just not something he just made up. There's actually a physiological truth behind that.

[27 : 24] And neurological studies have shown that singing engages your brain in a way that speaking alone just doesn't. There's actually studies on that.

So he was on to something. Because you can just say, God, you hold everything together. You can even say it with passion. God, you hold everything together.

But when you sing, You hold everything together. Even that's, you see that soaring? You hold everything together.

And you're just rising to that. Everything. Everything is being held together by God. And that does something in your brain. That communicates something to you.

So imagine that. God was on to something when he calls us to sing. And when he decided to use singing. He created our brains with the emotional capacity to process these things.

[28 : 29] And finally, singing doesn't just help us to feel emotions. It helps us to express emotions. And this comes quite naturally for some of you. You'll burst out to song, happy or sad.

But even for those of you who are less interested in singing, see if you can remember an occasion where singing really helps you to express your emotions. Because I think this.

I think the truth is that we're all actually quite willing to sing when we really actually care about something. Chris Thornton was telling me about a story of one time in a church gathering, he saw a guy who was, a guy who was there.

It was during singing time. And he was just kind of mouthing the words, kind of stoic and plain faced. And basically just going through the motions. And he noticed that. And then later in that day, Chris was at a rugby match, rugby sevens.

And lo and behold, he saw the same guy there. And what do you think he was doing? This guy was on fire. He was singing at the top of his lungs for his team, for his country.

[29 : 37] And you could tell what, maybe what was gripping this man's heart more. He wanted to sing for his team. Maybe some of you can relate to that. Maybe that national pride when you have, when you're singing your anthem, your home anthem at a big event.

Or when you're at a concert for your favorite band, and you're singing along with just throngs of fans. Yes, whatever that was.

It just comes out of your heart. Maybe in sadness or heartbreak. Those heartbreak songs, you just love it because it helps you. And your love life has gripped your heart, so you just want to sing out in joy or in pain or in suffering.

So the question, I think, is what moves you so much that you actually want to sing? In Exodus 15, we find the first explicit song in the Bible.

Explicit in the sense that it's clearly sung. It's not like got bad words. And God has, so this is what happens, Exodus. God has brought people through the Red Sea. He's delivered them.

[30 : 46] And then now they've crossed the Red Sea. They've been freed from the Egyptians. And guess what's the first thing they do? They sing a song. And the first few lines are really interesting.

Exodus 15, 2. The people sing, the Lord is my strength and my song. God is my song. God is my song. It's that amazing, beautiful phrase that captures the fact that God means everything to you. It's not just that you sing about God or you sing because of God or you sing for God or you sing to God, but that God himself is your song.

The emotion and love that you have for him just overflows into song. And it's not just positive emotions that the Bible talks about. You know, the majority of the psalms are actually laments. They're songs that are about bringing your frustration and your grief and your heartbreak to God. God's your loving father. He doesn't just want to hear your praise.

[31 : 54] He wants to hear your heartfelt cry out to him. He wants to hear your heartfelt passion for him. Church, if you're feeling disengaged from singing today, I think the question that the Holy Spirit is prompting you and I is who is your song?

What is your song? In other words, what's really gripping your heart that those emotions are just triggered and challenged? You know, I've been a Christian for a lot of years now and I've just recognized looking back that one of the constant struggles is forgetting and taking for granted that the God of the universe, the God who created everything, who's in sovereign control, He's also my heavenly Father.

He's my dad. He's my God who loves me. He's the one who's singing in delight over me. He has a purpose for me. And I just forget that.

And part of God's purpose for us is to live your faith out, not just between you and God, but in community. God doesn't just want you to sing to Him.

But as we learned last week, He's here that He wants us to gather and to serve and watch each other in the gospel. The two greatest commands are to love God and love others.

[33 : 27] So when it comes to singing, God is crystal clear that it is a communal thing as well. And this is our third point. Singing helps the church to love God and to love one another.

Colossians 3, going back to our main passage, it has this really beautiful passage about our calling as Christians. So I'm just going to read it for us.

It says, Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you.

So you also must forgive. And above all, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

Isn't that an amazing passage of our calling as a family? The church is about loving one another. And it's interesting then that that's where Paul transitions to our key verse today, 16.

[34 : 46] We're to teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. So everything you just heard in point two, it's not just for yourself.

It's for your family. It's for the church. It's not just that you want to remember truth, but you want to help the person next to you and behind you and in front of you remember truth.

It's not that you want to just engage your own emotions, but you want to fire up the person next to you to engage their emotions for God. You know, when you sing loudly with passion, you are actually teaching the people around you.

You're telling them, Kevin, God holds everything together. You're admonishing, you're encouraging them. Be the center of our lives.

Not just my life, but God, would you be the center of Michael and Joyce's lives? Would you be the place they fix their eyes? And it's not just the lyrics, as great as they are.

[35 : 56] You know, when someone sees you singing and engaged and passionate, I think that kind of encourages them too. It encourages me when I see that. When I'm just feeling and I see someone just engaged, part of me is just like inspired a little bit by that.

And you start to realize it's not just my song, it's our song. Have you ever been to a concert where everyone is just singing in unity and solidarity and just how beautiful that sounds and how much the oneness you feel with them?

And those are just strangers that you're singing around a pop song to. How much more should we be united in singing for our Heavenly Father? Because we are gathered around Him.

Again, we're not here to be entertained, but to wash each other in the Gospel. So let's just recap this really quickly. Singing begins with God, the one who rejoices us, over us in singing.

Singing uniquely helps us to remember God and to also engage our emotions for Him. And thirdly, singing helps the church to love God and to love one another.

[37 : 21] So, if you're a little distracted right now, it's okay because I have one application point for you. It's the easiest application point from this text.

Sing. Sing loudly. But there's a little bit more to it because I'm realistic here. I have emotions too. Some of us, we just don't feel like singing sometimes.

We just don't feel it. And this morning, I'm not asking you, God is not asking you to fake it. He's not asking you to pretend to be passionate and to pretend that you're really in love with God.

He doesn't want you to pretend. And this is why the final verse, the final verse and the final part of verse 16 is really interesting. This is what Paul says.

He says, sing psalms and hymns and spiritual psalms with thankfulness in your hearts to God. With thankfulness. And the phrase with thankfulness literally means in His grace.

[38 : 27] In the grace of God. God's grace is the starting point, the middle point, the ending point of your singing. The gift of eternal life that He has given to you.

So you don't necessarily need to feel like singing to have thankfulness for God's amazing grace for you, right? From that grace and thankfulness, you can sing.

So when you don't feel like singing this morning, start with what you know. You know that your Heavenly Father is rejoicing over you in singing. You know that the cross represents that Jesus Christ literally died for you in history.

You know all those things. So when you don't feel like singing, just start singing. When you don't feel like singing, start singing because the song itself will show you those emotions, right?

When you don't feel like singing, start singing because you're not just singing for God or for yourself, but you're singing for everyone in this room that they would also know the beauty of Jesus.

[39 : 43] So we're going to move into a time of communion right now. And I just can't think of it more apt time because all communion is about remembering what God did for you.

And if you're not feeling that this morning, this is a chance. You hold that bread representing God's body broken for you.

You see that cup representing God's blood shed for you. And just remember that. Meditate on that. If you're not yet a Christian here this morning, I think the question for us, for you, actually is what is your song?

Are you content to sing for your rugby team or to sing a pop song? Is that all that captures your heart?

Or will there be more to your life? Should there be more to your life? And I'm here to say that there is. God wants you to sing a song that will echo into eternity.

[40 : 53] A song that you can sing long past this physical lifetime as you have eternal life in His family. So I encourage you to just think about that. What is your song?

Will that last? Christ. This communion time is not for you right now because this is for people who have put their faith in Christ. But really take this time to think about that.

And I would love to talk to you more about that. I'd love to share with you what is this eternal song that we can sing about God.