

WHY DO WE SING?

Psalm 33:1-3

INTRO: Do you realize what a strange thing you have just done? You have gathered with a large group in a room, stood, and sang together for 20 minutes. That is really odd! And if you've been in church for much or all of your life, it may be hard to step back into the shoes of an outside observer in 21st century America and see just how peculiar an activity it is. Outside of church, where else do people gather on the weekends and sing? Choirs do it, but they are performing for an audience of people, or otherwise are practicing for that performance. At ballgames people sometimes anemically sing along with the National Anthem. At some pop concerts people may join in on their favorite song. But what we just did: standing in a room, not practicing for anything, not getting hyped up by an exciting band, just singing together (apparently) to ourselves – that's weird! Maybe if you're a visitor, you may know exactly what I'm talking about. Maybe you've been thinking, "This is odd and uncomfortable." So, we're going to ask the question this morning: Why do we sing?

Read Psalm 33:1-3

Note: Depending on the translation you're looking at, v. 1 may say (NAS "sing for joy" ESV "shout for joy" KJV "rejoice in the Lord"). The Hebrew word can mean to sing or to shout, a shout of triumph or even a cry for help. So we have to depend on the context to know which meaning the author has in mind. Clearly, the context of this Psalm is musical, so we know he means singing.

We're going to focus in on the last phrase in v. 1, "praise is becoming to the upright." (NAS "praise is becoming" ESV "praise befits" KJV "praise is comely" NIV "it is fitting") When God's children praise Him in song, it is fitting. But that doesn't mean only that it is appropriate or suitable, it also means it is attractive or beautiful!

ILLUS: When you meet a family with parents who clearly love each other, and exceptionally well-behaved children, that are very loving, kind and courteous, that is attractive. You say, "that is a beautiful family!" and you don't mean they are physically attractive, but rather that they are functioning together in the way they were designed to, and that is beautiful. That's what it looks like when God's people praise Him with singing.

God has clearly commanded singing as part of the worship of His people in both the OT and NT. (I was going to list some OT references in your notes, but it's everywhere, including our text in Psalm 33. And many of you could quote the texts in Eph 5 and Col 3 that command the church to "sing to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.") Singing is a non-negotiable. We do it every time we gather for corporate worship because God has explicitly commanded it. If we met regularly and never sang, we would be a disobedient, dysfunctional church

TRANS: I don't need to belabor the point. God has commanded singing. But can we observe more than that?



Throughout the narrative of Scripture, we see the pattern that singing is the appropriate response of the heart of the redeemed sinner to God's deliverance.

Exodus 15:1-2 (one of the first mentions of singing; immediately after being delivered at the Red Sea) *"Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said, 'I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. 'The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him.'"*

Revelation 5:9 (at the end of history, in the throne room of heaven, the 24 Elders) *"And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.'"*

Singing is the natural and appropriate response of the redeemed sinner to God's deliverance.

The core of our corporate worship is the redeemed, singing to the redeemer about the redemption. "Praise is becoming to the upright." The praise of the redeemed is beautiful!

And all of our worship is ultimately a response. Notice v. 4 begins with "For..." and describes who God is and what He has done. That is the "because" of our worship. God is the initiator, we are the responders. God is always the initiator of our relationship with Him; He has spoken truth into our lives; He has given us new life, and we then respond to Him with praise. And so **in our worship service here at Grace, we seek to reflect that pattern.** We begin with a call to worship, a passage of Scripture that speaks of who God is and what He has done. And often that passage will include a call for us to respond to that truth, then we do respond in our singing. That is by design, to remind us that all of our worship is a response to God's truth.

Worship is the response of the redeemed heart, and singing is an outward expression of that heart response. God delights in the praise of His children! **The praise of the redeemed is beautiful!**

TRANS: God's command and the example of Scripture is enough. But can we observe more than that?

Why has God commanded singing? Why has God designed us to respond this way? Well, whenever you ask the "why" question about God, you can never expect to find all the answers, but I believe it is honoring to the Lord for us to meditate on His commands and seek to further perceive and appreciate His wisdom in them. We can ask the question "why?" in a very humble and reverent way, not demanding that God vindicate Himself, but rather seeking to know Him better and glorify Him for His wise designs.

We can study and think about the nature of music and singing (the way we study other aspects of God's creation, like math or science or language) and we can see how God has wisely designed us so that singing is a uniquely well-suited vehicle for worship.



What does singing add? What is it about singing that is so fitting as a vehicle for praise? Could we not as easily speak our praise? **What is it that singing uniquely accomplishes?** There are other things certainly, but here are a few, some of them very practical:

- Singing aids memory (alphabet song, books of the bible, verses of hymns memorized)
- Singing encourages unity of the body
 - Experiment: Everyone testify about God's goodness to you, all at once. Go!
 - Even reading in unison, as we sometimes do in Scripture Reading is difficult, and even when we basically get the words together, it tends to be rather devoid of much emotion
 - The structure of music allows us to all be thinking and saying the same thing, at the same time, *with* the appropriate emotional impact. *God* designed that!
 - Corporate worship is not a bunch of individuals having their own private worship moment, just in the same room at the same time; We gather as *one* body, *one* church, lifting up *one* voice in testimony and praise to God.
- Singing requires the involvement of the whole person
 - The **mind** is focused on the text, processing the poetry and reflecting on the truth
 - The **body** is working to produce sound that is louder and more sustained than normal speech. I tell my voice students, "singing is hard work." If in a service, after a set of three songs, you're a little out of breath, that means you're doing it right!
 - The **emotions** are stirred as the deep affections of the **heart** are expressed through music
 - The **will** must be engaged to bring the other aspects together. To sing, you have to *want* to sing.
- Singing expresses and also shapes right affections toward God

Singing is the best vehicle to express with the whole person the range of emotions and affections toward God for who He is and what He has done. Things like joy, triumph, gratitude, adoration, penitence, sorrow over sin, cries for mercy, expressions of peace – these are sometimes best and most fully expressed through song. Through appropriate music, the emotion of the text is heightened and focused.

EXAMPLE: I could *say*, "Grace paid for my sin and brought be to life." We could all pretty easily say it together... But there's not much emotion in that, is there? That really needs to be shouted, right? Isn't that a great opportunity to fulfill the command of v. 3 to sing a song with a joyful shout? So, I could shout it, like this... Did you ever wonder if we should be shouting more in our services? Well, that's what music does for us. We can *sing*... Music uniquely provides a means of expressing truth, with the appropriate emotional impact, and all at the same time.

The heart of the redeemed sinner bursts out at the thought of the redemption and that heart wants expression! We do that in all areas of life, don't we?



ILLUS: Picture a championship college basketball game. It's been a tight game, but the other team is up by 2, there's only 3 seconds left on the clock, and the other team has possession. But somehow, the star playing gets his hands on the ball, does one of those crazy hook shots from center court, and sinks just before the buzzer! The team rushes him, the fans rush out onto the court... But one team-member is standing off to the side, apparently unaffected, even bored. What do the other players say to him? "What's *wrong* with you?! Don't you know what just happened?" And that's the right question: What's wrong with you? Something is wrong; either he doesn't understand the implication of what just happened on the court, OR maybe he's not a member of the team to begin with.

If you can hear about the redemption, the stunning last-hour victory that Christ won on the cross, defeating sin and death and the devil and what that means for us – if you can regularly hear about that and not be moved at *all* in your heart, not be moved to some outward expression of joy and celebration, then something is wrong!

- Maybe you're a believer but you're not staying close to Jesus. You've wandered off the court to go check out the concession stand and forgotten all about why you're there.
- Or maybe you were never on the team to begin with. Maybe the reason you're not excited about Jesus' victory is that you're on the other team. [PAUSE]

I once heard an atheist British comedian who was ridiculing religion. He went through a litany of various religions and denominations, giving a short summary of what they're like (of course it was oversimplified and sarcastic), but what he said about evangelical Christianity was fascinating. He said, "It seems like all they care about is that Jesus died, and He did it for them. And every week it's like it just happened." He meant it to be mocking, but would that could be said of us! That we know nothing except Christ crucified, and every week we celebrate His victory as if it had just happened! **The praise of the redeemed is beautiful!**

TRANS: But we don't feel that way every Sunday, do we? Sometimes when we gather, we're tired, we're frustrated, we're weighed down with worries or fears or guilt. We don't *feel* like praising. And that is when the body ministers to the body. We begin singing, those precious truths are brought before your eyes, and into your ears, and you are asked to reflect on Christ. But not only that, the truth is carried with music that heightens and deepens our expression of that truth. Our weekly, corporate worship gives us the much needed opportunity to get our thoughts and our affections back on track. The singing of God's people reminds us of truth and *also* how we should be feeling about that truth.

And that is one of the beautiful powers of music – what makes it so fitting – that **music not only provides a vehicle for expressing the affections of the heart, but at the same time it is *shaping* the affections**, telling us how we ought to feel about the truth we are singing. Music suggests emotions, telling you how to feel. Filmmakers know this and exploit it very well. The soundtrack tells you how you are supposed to be feeling about what you are seeing: excited, nervous, triumphant, sad. It can be done well and heighten the emotions you're already feeling, or it can be in a very manipulative way and encourage you to bypass the mind (analyzing what you're seeing) and go straight to the emotions. Advertisers are also masters at this; they use music in the commercial to tell you how happy and upbeat you should feel about that cool new gadget, or how manly and



patriotic you will feel in that new truck, or how exultant and triumphant you will feel when you drink Gatorade. Restaurants and Department stores pay experts to choose music to encourage certain feelings that will in turn encourage certain buying patterns. Music helps cue you how to feel, which can be abused yes, but it can be used for great good. In singing, when the emotion of the music and the words of the text are saying the same thing, it's a wonderful and helpful tool. God designed music, and God designed us as musical beings to respond that way.

Because music has such a powerful capacity to inform and shape the affections, it is so important that **both the texts and music used for worship be chosen very carefully and thoughtfully.** We're far from having it all figured out, but we as Pastors do work very hard to seek to introduce the best hymns we can find, whether ancient or very new. Hymn texts that are thoroughly biblical, doctrinally rich, high-quality writing. And tunes that are well-suited to the text (the music says the same thing the text says), tunes that sing well congregationally, and that encourage right and appropriate emotions in worship.

Because what is going on in the heart that matters most. God does take great delight in the singing of His children but He is always looking on the heart.

Isaiah 29:13-15 *Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote, therefore behold... the wisdom of their wise men will perish, And the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed." Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, and whose deeds are done in a dark place, and they say, "Who sees us?" or "Who knows us?" [Connect to last week: What kind of sinner are you?]*

Isaiah 1:11-20 ¹¹ "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. **"I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.** ¹² "When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? ¹³ "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies-- **I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.** ¹⁴ "I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. ¹⁵ **"So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you;** Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. ¹⁶ **"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil,** ¹⁷ **Learn to do good;** Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow. ¹⁸ "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, **"Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.** ¹⁹ "If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; ²⁰ "But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword." Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

These were the worship forms that God Himself had prescribed for them, and He said He couldn't stand it! Because they're hearts were far from Him and they were holding on to their iniquity. **God doesn't want your singing on Sunday, if he doesn't have your heart the rest of the week.**



But that *doesn't* mean that God only accepts worship from sinless people. (Aren't you glad?) He accepts and *delights in* the worship of repentant sinners!

Our worship is always inadequate;

- Our worship is often tainted by **mixed motivations** (“part of me wants to worship and part of me wants to be at home sleeping”).
- Our worship is hindered by our **distracted minds** (Have you been singing and found yourself thinking “Did I lock the car? The guitars sounded great today. Oh look what *she's* wearing...”)
- Our worship is overshadowed by **selfish, proud thoughts** (“I wonder what the person next to things about my singing. I don't know why we sing this song, I don't like it. Wow, so-and-so wasn't very friendly this morning...”)

All while we're supposed to be completely focused on God and pouring out our hearts in adoration and love.

Your worship will never be good enough to merit God's acceptance.

- God does not accept your worship because you are earnest enough, or sincere enough, or thoughtful enough.
- God does not accept your worship because it is conservative enough, or progressive and “authentic” enough, or old enough, or new enough, or reverent enough or exuberant enough.
- **God accepts your worship for *one* reason: because He accepts Christ, and you are in Him.**

God delights in the singing of His children because He delights in His Son!

Hebrews 13:15 *Therefore, **through Him** let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of our lips that confess His name.*

Have you ever thought about the aspect of Jesus' earthly life as a worshipper? As a Jew who kept the law perfectly, he would have participated in all of the Sabbath and Feast Day rituals, including singing Psalms. And He always worshipped perfectly and sinlessly. And then He died to pay the penalty for our distracted, selfish, inadequate, sinful worship. And then His record of active obedience and sinless worship is credited to the account of every believer. **Jesus worshipped for you!** And so now, with His record, you can truly be called upright. “Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!” Now you can come boldly and joyfully to the throne and offer your sacrifice of praise *through Him*, and God is delighted by it, accepts it, and is glorified by it. **The praise of the redeemed is beautiful!**

