The Church Singing

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Preacher: Graham Jones

[0:00] Unlike what we experience in the world around us, right? Thankfully, God's singing is also integral in his work of redemption.

! And it's actually, I think, in many ways, the primary reason that we, as the church, the redeemed people of God, are called and instructed to sing.
So who sings? God, but also the redeemed. And I want to show you this by just looking at, we can look at several examples. I just want to look at one in Exodus 14 and 15. So turn back there, Exodus 14 and 15.
I want to look at this together with you. In Exodus 14, the people of God, the family of Israel that's now become a great nation, they've been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years.
God raises up Moses to deliver them. He shows his power over all the other false gods of Egypt through the ten plagues. The final being the worst, the death of the firstborn son.
[1:01] That's the occasion where God institutes the Passover. He calls them to sacrifice the Passover lamb, to put the blood on the doorway so that the angel of death would pass over them.

And yet all the firstborn of Egypt perishes in God's judgment. And finally, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, says, all right, go. They leave the land of Goshen, and God leads them to the Red Sea.
And pick up with me in verse 10 of Exodus 14. Exodus 14, 10. When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them.
They're back. And they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you've taken us away to die in the wilderness?
What have you done in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt? Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.
[2:05] And Moses said to the people, Fear not. Stand firm. And see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today.

For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. And listen to this in verse 14. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.
When the people of God are trapped between the natural death that would happen if they were just to wander into the Red Sea, and the harmful murder of their enemies that are barreling towards them, the most revealing thing, I think, about humankind is that when that happens, you don't have a people that go, God, we know that you're good.
We trust in your promises. We've figured this out. You've got it, God. You don't have a people that are like that, right? They're going, well, figures.
I knew this was going to happen. I mean, despair is just, that's just where they're living, right? They don't see another way out. But Moses says, you only have to be silent.
[3:23] God will fight for you. Moses understands that the Lord is the Redeemer. He is the one who is mighty to save. And that's exactly what God does. Impossibly and miraculously, God splits the Red Sea in two.

Israel passes over on dry land, and when the Egyptian army chases after them into that dry place, the sea washes back over them, destroying the army and all of God's enemies in that moment.
And what happens next? I mean, what's your heading in Exodus 15? Song of Moses.
Exodus 15, 1. Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.
Think about Isaiah 12, what was read as our call to worship. Verse 2, The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise him.

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[4:32] My Father's God, and I will exalt him. Friends, the people could only be silent while they were waiting for God's redemption. In fact, they weren't even confident that it would happen.

But after God redeemed them, they could only sing. Song was the only right response of a people humbled, brought to their knees because of a gracious God who saved them from certain death. Friends, when we're asking the question of who sings, the answer is the redeemed. The answer is not just simply, the Bible just calls for people who happen to be in church buildings on Sunday from 8 a.m. to noon or whenever you meet, that you should sing.
The Bible is not saying that singing is a way that you can sort of like get to God or get those things that you want from God or prove your dedication to the Lord.
No, no, no. The redeemed sing. Those who recognize that they have been saved from the certain death, the consequences for sin, all the way to come back from Genesis 3, that they've been redeemed and saved from the clutches of their enemy, of Satan and the world and their own flesh.
[5:53] Right? The ones who are called to sing in Scripture are the redeemed. That's why we're going to continue talking about the church this week because knowing whose we are in our membership and in how we gather, knowing how we're organized, knowing what the Bible says about who the church is, is not just a side note to how we think through congregational singing and congregational worship.

They're inextricably linked because in Scripture, the redeemed are the ones who sing the church. We can talk about Hannah and David and Isaiah and Jonah and others, but just from Moses' example here in Exodus, we know who sings.
It's the redeemed. If you're interested, or maybe you lead worship in your context or you're hoping to do that, the book I'd recommend, I found helpful, David Peterson called Engaging with God, a biblical theology of worship is what it really is.
He says something really, really strong here and just simple. He says redemption is for the purpose of worship and service to God. Before we move on from Exodus, just think about where was God leading the people?
After the Red Sea, was Israel just to kind of like, all right, guys, that was fun. We're going to go this way. Oh, you guys are heading north. Oh, great. All right, we're going to split off. Like, okay, you guys have fun.
[7:16] Like, just go anywhere they want, figure out their own thing. No. No. Do you remember where God was leading them? He was leading them to Sinai.

He was leading them to the mountain of worship where God was going to make His covenant with them, instruct them how they were to live. So when we sing, there is some element, as we recognize who sings, we are the redeemed.
There's also a way that helps us lead into the why should we sing or what's the purpose for our singing, right? It's for the purpose of worship and service to God, that we would glorify God with our singing.
So if you're taking notes, we already said who should sing. We know that God sings over us, His redeemed people, but we know that we are the ones who sing, the redeemed, that is, believers, the church. But why should we sing?
Well, it's because God created us for it and commanded us to do it. God created us for it and He commanded us to do it. Even just looking at Israel's example, I mean, He really made the nation of Israel.
[8:23] We know that all the way back in Genesis 12 when He called Abram, Abraham, set apart that people to be a blessing to the nations, right? But all the way through in Exodus, what we see here, I mean, these people are slaves in Egypt.

They were nothing in that context. And now they've been made their own nation. In Exodus 19, they're going to be called a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, right? God has made a people, He's created them, and He's commanded them for worship, for service to Him.
Even just specific on singing, I think it's really good to note that the Bible makes it clear that God has created us for singing and commanded us to sing.
Scripture's full of commandments to sing. The Psalms in particular, you'll hear several calls to worship as we have already from, I think Psalm 145 was this morning, if I remember right, several others that are going to include commands like sing praise to the Lord.

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Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Let all creation praise the Lord. Those are commands from God through His Word that we are to sing, to bring glory to God.
[9:30] Even just in these Psalms, 40, 96, 98, 144, 149, those are the ones that I caught, we're commanded to sing new songs to the Lord. So that there would be this ever-increasing, ever-growing, continual singing that we would do throughout our lives because that's what we are created for and that's what we've been commanded to do.

I think another way that we can think through this idea of the importance of singing in Scripture is even just to take a moment to think about its place in the Bible.
My wife and I, we closed on a house last week and it's like, what year is it? 86 is when it was built and I'm pretty sure that the last time it was remodeled was in 1987 because I have been scraping a lot of popcorn ceilings this past week.
My arms are very sore and scraping a lot of wallpaper. And so anyways, I've been trying to get the house ready but while I've been doing that, Bethany's been at home with our son Luke and she's been packing.
I already told you I'm a nerd. So she's been texting me even literally today and asking like, okay, what do I do with all these heavy, stupid books? Because I've got all these chonky, you know, fantasy books.
[10:47] I love the maps and the glossaries and all that kind of stuff. Like I'm just into that. And when people visit us at our apartment, like those are like in our living room because Bethany's really kind or she just doesn't like them in the only other room in our bedroom or whatever.

I don't know. But either way, when people walk in, they can see pretty clearly by what's on the shelf like, oh, I think I know what this guy likes, right? They're seeing these big like heavy fantasy books. I think in a manner of speaking in the library of Scripture, when we look at what's on God's shelf, so to speak, and how He reveals His Word to us, I think we get a glimpse of what God likes.
I mean, what's the biggest book in the middle of your Bible? The Psalms. 150 chapters of song after song after song after song after song praising God, wrestling with God, declaring God's glory.
I think that shows a little bit of what God's like. How about this aspect? A third of your Bible is poetry. That's a pretty big deal. Actually, most of the time when God speaks, especially to the prophets, He's speaking in a poetic verse of some kind.
So when we think about God creating us and commanding us to sing, I really do think that there's something else that we can dig a little bit deeper in here in terms of why should we sing?
[12:03] And I believe it hinges on this, that singing shapes us. Singing in some way, it shapes us. It helps form who we are.

Do you remember what I read at the top of our time together from Psalm 49? There was an unusual little verse at the end there in that passage. Verse 4, the psalmist says this, I will incline my ear to a proverb.
I will solve my riddle to the music of the liar. I think that's a really weird thing to be in the Bible, if I'm being honest. Like if I told you, like hey, I'm going to try to bring to you some wisdom from God's word, but I'm going to need a backing track.
Is that alright? Like I think you'd be a little like, I don't know about this guy. Is this a musical? We don't need that, right? And I don't think that's what he's saying either, to be clear.
But I think he's saying something closer to that than you think. I think the psalmist is trying to get us to understand that again, if singing isn't just a sort of like optional side dish to what the church does when she gathers, then there must be some reason the Lord's given it.
[13:19] And I think it's because singing shapes us in a particular way. Singing helps embed the word of God into our hearts. Theologian John Frame says it this way, music in worship is one of God's best tools for getting the words into our hearts.

I'll let somebody else say it because that seems really strong. Music in worship is one of God's best tools for getting the word into our hearts. words. I mean, just to apply the point, I thought Aaron did a wonderful job this morning preaching from Nehemiah 8.
Does anybody, without looking at their notes, remember what the third point was? Maybe some of you do. Praise God. I hope you do. It hasn't been that long. But much less, what about your pastor at home's second or third point of their sermon this past week?

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What about the week before? What about their main point? Would you be able to go back through the years and name, I hope you can, name most of the books that have been preached in the sermon series.
But, hey, our human minds are fickle. We do not have perfect memories. We struggle with this, right? We need the help of healthy congregational singing to bury the word of God in our hearts.
[14:34] So that, there were a few years when I was, I was working bivocational and I was part-time at the fields for a few years. And I, I was working for this non-profit where I would go and play music in nursing homes and memory care facilities.

And maybe some of you know this from experience in your own families or those that you know. I can tell you from personal experience, the last thing that so many of our oldest in our community, when the names of their closest loved ones go, when they're looking at me and they think I'm their son or their nephew or their music teacher or their old coach or an old pastor, even when they can't have a conversation with me at all, just start playing a little music.
I start to see lips moving. The eyes get a little brighter. They're remembering the words to old hymns, even when they can't remember anything else at all.
Friends, that's not an accident. That's a grace from the Lord. I know that time in life feels impossibly far right now, but your singing right now, God is going to use to shape your 30s, your 40s, your 70s, your 80s, if He gives you that long.
That's how vital it is that if our singing shapes us so strongly that we consider what we sing, what we sing.
[16:18] I've got to move quickly through this. I'm going to give a single sentence in three parts, okay? Just consider what we should sing in the church. God-focused praise with Christ-centered words from Spirit-transformed hearts.

Talk through each of these briefly here. God-focused praise. The purpose of our praise is to glorify God. God. It is His glory that we are after. So in short, can I encourage you that when it comes to whether it's in your youth group gatherings, if you have any influence on the songs that are being chosen there, or even as you're thinking through the kind of church that you're going to be a part of one day when you go to college or you move away from home and you're thinking through the songs that are being sung, listen for songs that have God-focused praise, not man-centered sort of just pithy statements and wisdom from the world and things about what we can get from God or how impressive we are to God that He would love us because of something He saw in us.
It's just so against what the Bible teaches about salvation and redemption. But we should be singing God-focused praise. What's going to help us with that? Well, that we're singing it with Christ-centered words.
You don't have to turn there but I'll look at this for us in Colossians 3. Colossians 3.16 is such a crucial verse to this idea.
Paul says, 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.
[17:58] Paul doesn't say let the word of Christ dwell in you richly through the sermon or the Bible study or your discussion afterwards. Though I hope those things are true. He's saying, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you're doing these things, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, that you're addressing one another in wisdom when you're doing those things.

Paul's hope and even his command and this being Scripture, the Holy Spirit's command of the church is that the word of Christ would be the center of our focus in what we sing.
That means we need to prioritize the lyrics. That means we need to prioritize the gospel. That means we need to keep Christ at the center of what we're singing. That means that we should never get tired of singing about the cross because if Paul himself says elsewhere in the New Testament when he's talking to the church in Corinth that what he aims to preach is Christ crucified, that's the word of Christ he's delivering to them.
If he centers it on the cross, we should believe that our songs, our catalogs, the music that we sing when we gather should be centered on the cross as well. And when that's happening, that singing shapes us.
And it's happening from spirit-transformed hearts. Ephesians 5, verse 19, Paul contrasting drunkenness with wines is saying, hey, be filled by the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody of the Lord with your heart.

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[19:35] We are not a people who are proclaiming a gospel that is encouraging the world to just sing some really great music and that will get you closer to God.

We're not a people that are trying to worship ideas themselves or just pay lip service in routine and sort of like performing for God so that we can go about our business the rest of the week.
In fact, when that happens in Scripture, Amos 5, God says, hey, I plug up my ears when I hear songs like that. But when we are singing because we have been redeemed, we recognize what God has done for us in salvation and that singing actually has something to do with then what we're going to be thinking during the sermon because we're singing songs that are filled with Scripture, because we're singing songs that are filled with the gospel, that are focused on Christ, then we begin to understand that congregational singing, it is meant to be done for the purpose of transformation.
Spirit-transformed hearts that are filled not with the pleasures of the world, but with what God has to offer in His Word, in the gospel, and in Christ. So what should we sing?
God-focused praise, Christ-centered words from Spirit-transformed hearts. How should we sing?
There's a lot of things we could say here, but I'll just say one.
[21:16] How should we sing? Together. Corporate. Congregational. Church singing.

It's the reason that you've probably heard, I hope, from your leaders, your teachers, that the most important instrument when you gather is the congregation's voice. It's not an accident, I don't believe, that after both of those passages in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, do you know what Paul talks about next?
It's kind of weird. Husbands and wives. Children. Servants. Why does he do that? Because when Paul thinks of congregational singing, he thinks of relationships in the church.
As we sing, as we remember what God has done for us in Christ, we remember His work on the cross, we remember His glorious resurrection, we long for His return.
As we're declaring those things, declaring God's promises, singing God's word, we're doing that in a way that identifies us as a people.
[22:28] Not just individual piety, not just dark room, eyes closed, sequestered off, but we are eyes open, hearts open, voices up, looking into one another's faces, remembering, I'm not alone.

God didn't just bring a single Moses to the Red Sea. He brought a people. And one day, we know in Revelation 15 that that same song will become the song of the Lamb of all God's people, the church, the perfect bride gathered together to sing God's praises forever.
So, let's remember that singing is not just an additive thing. As we keep the main thing, the main thing, the preached word central in our gathering, let's let the singing of God's word and God's promises and the gospel adorn the word, apply the word, help us to anticipate the word so that we can then continue to be transformed into the image of Christ.
So, we really would be a people who would glorify God forever. Let's pray together. Father, we are entirely in need of your help to remember this.
We are just like Israel so often, complaining in bitter despair, but God, I pray that you would help us to recognize the glory that you've given us in Christ that is only ours in Christ that you would fill these churches by your spirit and that you would help them to sing songs that truly are focused on your praise, that are filled with the words of the gospel and the true words of scripture and that are focused on lifting high the name of Christ.
[24:26] I gotta pray that these students, as they continue to grow in gospel singing, that you'd encourage them and that they would know that their voices are gonna be an encouragement to their fellow church members back at home, that there are moms and dads who need to be encouraged to hear them singing on Christ the solid rock I stand.

There are friends that need to hear their voices singing that they also are prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it. God, would you build up these local churches through their singing so that the word of Christ would be proclaimed even more effectively in their communities for your glory.
We ask it all in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Would you stand and let's sing together a God-focused, Christ-centered, Spirit-transformed song.
All glory be to Christ. Let's lift our voices together. Should nothing of our lives and let's sing together.
Do you who boast tomorrow's gain, tell me what is it?

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[25:55] Do you who post tomorrow's gain Tell me what is your life A mist that vanishes at dawn All glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ our King All glory be to Christ His rule and reign we'll ever sing All glory be to Christ His will be done

His kingdom come On earth as is above Who is Himself our daily bread Praise Him the Lord of love Let living water satisfy The thirsty without price We'll take a cup of kindness Yet all glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ His rule and reign we'll ever sing
All glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ When on that day the great I am The faithful and the true The Lamb who was for sinners slain Is making all things new Behold our God shall live with us And be our steadfast light And we shall ere His people be
All glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ our King All glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ His rule and reign we'll ever sing All glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ our King All glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ All glory be to Christ Let's pray together Lord we glorify You because You are good
We thank You that You have given us breath in our lungs And these voices that we can lift In praise to You Whenever we consider that You have redeemed us You are a good God who sings over us We glorify You Father We thank You for Your Son Jesus Christ And it's in His name we pray Amen Would you be seated Good morning God din't let me feel

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