

A New Song for the Nations

Psalm 96

“Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples!”

Introduction: This past week a group of over 20 men from this church met up with fellow elders from Poland, and New Hampshire for our annual trek to Shepherd’s Conference, a gathering of Christian workers from around the world. The Word was preached, fellowship experienced, food consumed, and connections made. But one of the highlights each year that never gets tired or boring is the time of singing, with thousands of voices lifted up, to the glory of God! Sometimes it means you can sing at the top of your lungs without fear of people hearing your voice built best to be heard alone in the shower (or the advice some gave in the seminary choir, *“More video, less audio”*), or to simply listen and take in the onslaught of unified sound. If part of worship is singing, it is the height of worship, a glimpse of heaven, a stirring of affections and emotions.

But if we are honest, that is NOT always our experience when we gather to worship together. It has been my experience over 47 years in the church that we together and me in particular can often miss the **reason why we sing together, or have our minds and hearts disengaged when lift praises to the Lord**. Some have cited style or volume as the reason why they cannot worship through song, but I’d venture to say most of us miss out because we are either un-prepared or unclear as to the point. Personally I miss it sometimes because I am talking with others in the foyer, a choice made to maximize relational equity but at the cost of meaningful engagement in my heart in giving praise. But the reality is, singing praises together is NOT a throwaway, not a show, not a time of transition, not a mere tradition, and definitely NOT unimportant, but a vital part of corporate worship that is designed for a specific purpose and given as a gift from God for the good of His people.

Let’s briefly review **why we would sing together:**

- **We are COMMANDED to do so –**

Colossians 3:16 (c. f. Eph. 5:19; Psalm 33:3; 95:1) *“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.**”*

Part of a unified front in the church is playing out the “one-another’s” by putting on love (Col. 3:14), walking in harmony and thankfulness. Singing has a unique way of not only uniting our hearts but to teach and admonish each other in wisdom. It also allows us to **remember** key truths and even memorize Scripture that we would otherwise forget.

- **Uniquely builds UNITY among God’s people –**

Certain Psalms were written to be “call and response”, as in Psalm 118. “Let Israel say...Let the house of Aaron say...Let those who fear the LORD say, **His steadfast love endures forever**”. (cf the repetition of Psalm 136 and the call response of Psalm 129). This is the beautiful reality of singing in churches around the world. Last January I had the privilege of worshipping with the church in Lodz, under the gifted leading of Marcin Obijalski (you can get his autograph later), and was struck with the fact that we SANG THE SAME SONGS, and if they were unfamiliar to me, they were written about the same things we sing

about: God's glory, the beauty of Jesus Christ, the power of the gospel, and the greatness of salvation. Singing build unity, and songs reveal it.

- **As image bearers, we imitate our SINGING GOD –**

Zephaniah 3:17 (cf. Heb. 2:12) *“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”*

In restoring Israel, God will exult over them, and sing loudly! That is a principle I personally resonate with.

- **God has given us songs in the Bible to SING –**

Scripture is full of songs written by people who expressed deep affection for Him: **Moses** (Exodus 15; Deut. 32); **Deborah** (Judges 5); **Hannah** (1 Sam. 2:1-10); **David** (2 Sam. 22); **Isaiah** (Isa. 5:1-7; 42; 52, 53); **Mary** (Luke 1:46-55); **Simeon** (Luke 2:29-32); **Paul and the early church** (Phil. 2:6-11, Col. 1:15-20). Singing these songs of praise was a normal expression of worship throughout Biblical history.

- **Biblical Singing properly engages our AFFECTIONS with the Word –**

Psalm 45:1 *“My heart overflows with a pleasing theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe”*

*“The duty of singing praises to God seems to be appointed **wholly to excite and express religious affections**. No other reason can be assigned, why we should express ourselves to God in verse, rather than in prose, and do it with music, but only that such is our nature and frame, **that these things have a tendency to move our affections.**”* (Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*)

Jesus called us to worship in both *spirit and truth*. The truth of God's Word, reality of redemption, lavish nature of grace, majesty and beauty of Christ, the immensity of salvation and the glory of God should **stir our affections** properly, engaging our heart and feeling high and proper feelings for Him. When our minds are ground in truth and we understand the nature of our sin, the path is not long to praise the Lord in light of forgiveness and undeserved reconciliation.

But perhaps a less understood yet vital reason that we sing is to **behold the glory of God** as both the **motivation and goal** to reach the **NATIONS** with the good news of salvation! In other words, there is a large focus on missions in singing, one that reminds us of both **urgency and possibility**. We are such a forgetful people, and singing is designed to remind us of the most important things, and reaching the nations with the gospel is one of them. Perhaps no other part of Scripture captures this reality more than **Psalm 96**, a call to glorify God among the nations, calling all people to lift their voice in praise to the true, powerful and sovereign God who brings salvation to all who would believe. John Piper wrote:

“worship is the goal and the fuel of missions: Missions exists because worship doesn't. Missions is our way of saying: the joy of knowing Christ is not a private, or tribal, or national or ethnic privilege. It is for

*all. And that's why we go. Because we have tasted the joy of worshiping Jesus, and we want all the families of the earth included."*¹

So let's look at this wonderful Psalm which deals with our motive and goal, and then we will conclude with a few takeaways for our church in particular.

We Sing Because All Glory Belongs to God (Psalm 96:1-6)

*Oh sing to the LORD a **new song**; sing to the LORD, all the earth!*

² *Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.*

³ *Declare his glory among the **nations**, his marvelous works among **all the peoples!***

⁴ *For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be **feared** above all gods.*

⁵ *For all the gods of the peoples are **worthless idols**, but the LORD made the heavens.*

⁶ ***Splendor and majesty** are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.*

Often we do not know too much about the background of a Psalm, but this one has almost identical words and phrases as **1 Chronicles 16:8-34**, a song written by David when the Ark of the Covenant came back to Jerusalem. It was to be sung with thanksgiving by **Asaph and his brothers**, accompanied with harps, cymbals, and trumpets. In his commentary, John Phillips said it was most likely sung in a rhythm of three stanzas, with verse 1 & 2 sung by the Levites, and every third verse sung by a choir. In other words, after the debacle of Uzzah dying because of the unbiblical way it was transported (1 Chron. 15:13), it finally came back home to the praise of ALL of Israel.

Notice there are **three commands or imperatives of praise here in the first 3 verses: Sing, Tell, and Declare**. The song sung is directed **to the LORD**, an important reminder that worship is always vertical, with only secondary effects toward each other. Notice that the **content of the song is a "NEW SONG"**. What did David mean by that? Two texts give us a clue:

Isaiah 40:3 *"He put a **new song** in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord"*

Revelation 5:8-9 *"And they sang a **new song**, saying,*

*"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you **ransomed people for God** from every **tribe and language and people and nation**, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."*

The "new song" that we sing is one that is given by God Himself about His redemption of a people for His own possession and the demonstration of His power. It is radically focused on God, not us, on His work, not our needs. This new song leads us to **tell of His salvation from day to day**, which means the proclaiming of His salvation is not bound to just saving from sin, but all acts of redemptive history, from creation to redemption. Singing and telling have a purpose of praise but also of proclamation, that He is a saving God. But where are we to do this?

Look at verse 3. John Phillips said *"if we had no other verse in the Bible but this one to teach us our duty to the lost and pagan lands, this would be enough."*² This single verse in a context of praise and worship

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/missions-exists-because-worship-doesnt-a-bethlehem-legacy-inherited-and-bequeathed#:~:text=Therefore%2C%20worship%20is%20the%20goal,of%20saying%3A%20the%20joy%20of>

² John Phillips, "Exploring the Psalms: Vol 2", p. 71

gives us the **what and the where** of missions, the purpose and the power. We are to **DECLARE**, which simply means to give an account, about the **glory of God**. Remember, this was the purpose for which mankind was created, to image forth and reflect back the glory of God as we would multiply and fill the earth. We were supposed to, as perfect created beings, value the worth and greatness of God so much, that we would live in perfect obedience and enjoyment of Him. But when Adam and Eve chose to sin, the world was plunged into darkness, sin, and death, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the **glory of God**”* (Rom. 3:23). So our goal, out of our worship, is to give an account of the glory of God, to tell of His marvelous works, so that people hear about Him, and by comparison see our utter helplessness and the fact that we are under judgment, and turn in repentance and faith. We are **ambassadors** (2 Cor. 5:20), proclaiming a message that was given to us, and one that we believe by conviction.

Where do we declare His glory? To or among the NATIONS! Who are the nations? They are part of every tribe, tongue, and people group that are represented in heaven. It is a message for ALL the peoples! The Great Commission calls us to *“go and make disciples of all nations”* (Matthew 28:18), which came out of the authority Jesus gave and the promise of His presence to assure its success, but it was NOT a new command. A disciple is one who becomes a learner, one who turns from his own way to follow obediently all that Christ commanded. But the question must also be asked: how is a disciple made and what motives us to go. The answer to both questions is the same: **the glory of God**. It is God’s glory that people have violated and must be restored to once again do in the gospel, and it is this same glory that **motivates us to go**. We cannot commend to others what we do not treasure ourselves. Reaching the nations is not for the faint of heart, and it is an impossible venture without the greatest of purposes. We are called to wake the dead, to proclaim a message to enemies of God that they have violated His glory and are worthy of punishment. We declare that unless they turn from their sin to Christ, who took our place, we will face judgment.

To sum up: **If we are not awe struck in worshipping our glorious God in fullness of truth and affection we will never have the sufficient motivation to truly reach the nations with the life giving gospel.**

This is why David goes on to describe the **majesty** of God. We worship God by praising His name and declaring to the truth to the nations because:

He is **GREAT and to be Feared** – this is the fear that moves TOWARD Him in reverence, not running FROM Him out of concern for punishment.

He is the **TRUE GOD, distinguished from all fake gods or idols** – Our world is full of faux gods, those that call us to trust in them, be it *materialism, politics or the mirage of control*

He is **MAJESTIC and His glory is evident** – God does NOT hide Himself or the truth of His character, but displays His strength and beauty as King, Creator, and Sovereign God.

We Sing Because All Gifts Belong to God (Psalm 96:7-9)

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!

⁸ *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!*

⁹ *Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!*

Building off of praising the majesty of God, David gave a threefold command to ‘*ascribe*’, which means to **actively acknowledge, attribute, or credit God** with what is due to Him, which specifically is the **glory due His name**. Here, there is a renewed urgency and sobriety in worship that does not have to **generate**

content but simply recognize the reality of God's greatness. Notice that again, the scope of this praise is for "all the families of the peoples", a call to humbly but decidedly come to **bring, worship, and tremble before the Lord**. There is no split focus here, no mixing up of who gets the praise. God expects reverence, submission, holiness and awe in His presence. In a world that lacks an understanding of transcendence, we are called to just that when we are called to ascribe to the Lord the value of His worth.

We Sing Because All Judgment Belongs to God (Psalm 96:10-13)

*10 Say **among the nations**, "The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; **he will judge the peoples with equity.**"*

11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

12 let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

*13 before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes **to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness. and all the peoples see his glory.***

The final motivation to worship and call the nations to do the same comes in the form of the fact that God will **judge the nations WITH EQUITY**. Our world clamors for equity --- treat me the same --- until it comes to judgment. Then we want to be the exception. But one of the motivations given is the fact that the world will see the glory of God when He comes to judge the earth according to His perfect standard of righteousness and faithfulness. God is patient, not wishing that any would die (2 Pet. 3:9), but there will come a day when His patience is over and judgment will come. It is because of this truth and reality that we persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11).

Let me try to sum up the point of the Psalm by applying it a couple of ways for our church in terms of worship and missions.

1. **God LOVES the nations, and so should we** – If heaven will be filled with peoples of every tribe, tongue, and nation, our strategy, prayer, and intention should reflect it in both missions and disciple-making. Our church should reflect our community in ethnic make-up, and we should be willing to both **go and send** those to other people groups. Cross-cultural outreach does not just happen. There must be intention. That is why it is significant that we have brothers from Poland here today, and that we will be sending Alana to Japan, and we are praying for a Spanish speaking elder. Reaching the nations must be a part of our hope, goal, and sacrifice.
2. **Worship is the conduit for both purpose and motivation in missions** - It is abundantly clear that the main motive for reaching the nations is an undiluted worship of the Lord and a delight in His glory. Without a clear understanding of the holiness, greatness, and supremacy of God's glory, missions would die on the vine. It would sprout up and in the midst of a lack of fruit or response to the gospel, we would call it quits. But what is at stake is NOT mere numbers of converts or churches planted or disciples made, but honoring the Lord by proclaiming that we believe He is all satisfying and glorious, and call others to see and savor Him. This is why **corporate gathering**, both on Sunday and in Shepherding groups, are NOT box checking throw always, a deflating and uninspired time that we plow through. Rather, they are times to align our hearts and minds with each other as we focus NOT on ourselves but on the glory of God. Every part is important: **intentional fellowship, persistent prayer for each other, spirit filled worship, and biblical preaching**. Worship is commanded but we don't merely fall into it. We must prepare, focus, and plan to make sure we can ascribe, sing, and worship to the fullest.

3. **The church is vehicle to call the nations to worship** – We want to support missions, but we ultimately want to be a **sending church**, making disciples who are actively making disciples, with some who are willing to leave and go to areas of the world where there are no churches because there are not believers.

Ephesians 3:7-10 *“Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the **unsearchable riches of Christ**, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, 10 **so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”***

Ephesians 3:20-21 *“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 **to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen”***

We want to give **intentional effort to bring the gospel and the knowledge of the glory of God where no healthy churches exist**. Church planting is not the only expression of missions, but it will be our primary one, since God has called the church to be the primary place of worship, sending, and proclamation. Our prayer is that we not only will be a part of planting and encouraging churches, but also equipping disciples here to be sent to the Harvest. The path forward to do that is to help each one of us see the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Our depth of worship will determine the breadth of our effectiveness in our mission. So let’s make it our ambition to remember that everything we do matters in terms of glorifying God, so we want to make sure that is reflected in our life together in worship in God’s church.