

January 5th, 2020

# The Singing and Sinning of an Experimental Christian

Psalm 119:169-176

## What is an experimental Christian?

This first morning of 2020, we finish our series on Psalm 119, and we have been asking the question what is an experimental Christian? Dear congregation I hope that you can start to be able to answer that question now. The most dangerous threat to Christianity today is *not* drinking or drugs, the sexual revolution or persecution, bullets or bombs or any of these things. No, the most dangerous threat is counterfeit Christianity—counterfeit religion. Jesus labors in the gospels time and time again to distinguish between true or experimental Christianity and its counterfeit.<sup>1</sup>

There are false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves (**Matthew 7:15-20**); there are the weeds that look just like the wheat *at first*, but at the harvest will be gathered together and burned (**Matthew 13:24-30**); there were true disciples who hungered after Jesus as the bread of life, and those who *only* hungered after His physical bread (**John**

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<sup>1</sup> Furthermore there is the net that is thrown into the sea gathering fish of every kind, yet only some of them were the good sort, the rest were thrown away (Matthew 13:47-50); there is the story of the wedding feast and the man who snuck in with no wedding garment who when discovered was cast into outer darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 22:1-14); there is the parable of the talents where all three servants were given property to steward for the Master, and yet one was discovered to be wicked and slothful and he was stripped of his in the end (Matthew 25:14-30); there will be those who stand before Jesus on the final day and plead "Lord, Lord...did we not...do many might works in your name?" and Jesus will say "I never knew you; depart from me" (Matthew 7:21-23); the parable of the sower where only one type of soil alone produced lasting fruit (Mark 4:1-20); the cleansing of the ten lepers by Jesus, and only one returned to give praise to God (Luke 17:11-19); Nicodemus whom Jesus recognized as a great religious teacher in Israel and yet told him "unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:1-15); there was the parable of the two houses one whose foundation was dug deep and laid upon a rock, and the other built on sand utterly shattered and ruined with the storm came (Luke 6:46-47); there were those disciples who truly forgave from the heart—70x7, and those who proceeded to choke those who owed them but a small amount (Matthew 18:21-35);

**6:26**): there were the two sons—the younger who disobeyed at first and then came to repentance, and the older who though he lived with his father secretly hated him (**Luke 15:11-32**); there is the parable of the ten virgins—all waiting for the bridegroom, yet only five of them were ushered into the presence of the Bridegroom, the rest because they didn't have the oil of the Holy Spirit were shut out (**Matthew 25:1-13**); and there were the disciples of Jesus *themselves*—all of them had an outward form of religion and yet one of them was the devil (**John 6:70**).

The outward form of religion will not save anybody. No, conversion is the vital issue. Jesus said “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (**Matthew 18:3<sup>2</sup>**). Psalm 119 has been showing us how conversion changes a person from the inside out.

### **The Singing of an Experimental Christian**

This morning the Psalmist finishes at the very peak, on the very mountain top of Christian experience: singing his heart out to the Lord.

v.171 “My lips pour forth *praise*...”

v.172 “My tongue will *sing* of your word...”

v.175 “Let my soul live and *praise* you...”

Singing is supreme activity of all the universe.

God created the angels so that they could sing at the unveiling of existence: **Job 38:4-7** “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?...When the morning stars sang together and all the songs of God shouted for joy?”

Singing is what all creation does: **Psalm 98** “Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!...Let the rivers clap

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<sup>2</sup> NASB

their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD” (v.4, 8, 9a; cf. **Song 2:12**)

Singing is the consummate activity of the church. What is the largest book in the Bible? It’s a song book—The Psalms.

Singing is the supreme activity of Heaven. **Revelation 5:9** “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.’”

It’s no wonder that the Psalmist ends precisely here—in song. That is what all the Christian life is aiming at: for that day when we will finally cross the Jordan, and enter the promised land, when we will meet the King face to face, with no more veil, with no more sin, with no more temptation, with no more death or tears, or crying or pain. When there will be only one thing left to do: to sing about Him, to sing to Him, to sing with Him, and to have Him sing over us.<sup>3</sup>

The Psalmist is preparing us for that day.

### *The Big Idea...*

We will sing for all eternity to the Good Shepherd who sought us when we were lost and bought us at His own cost

- ☆ The Primer to Singing
- ☆ The Practice of Singing
- ☆ The Person of Our Singing

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<sup>3</sup> Zephaniah 3:17

## I. The Primer to Singing

### The Psalmist's Parallelism

What do we need in order to truly sing to the Lord? Of course a person must first be converted. But is that all we need? No. Please look at **v.169-170** “Let my cry come before you, O Lord; *give me understanding* according to your word! Let my plea come before you; *deliver me* according to your word.” In terms of its literary structure, this is called parallelism. A parallelism is “...when two or more lines...correspond closely with one another in order to make a point.”<sup>4</sup> Look at the correspondence:

**v.169a** “Let my cry come before you...”

**v.170a** “Let my plea come before you...”

And then we also see the similarity in the last phrase found in both verses: “according to your word.” The difference between the two verses is in the *specific request*. In **v.169** he prays “give me understanding.” In **v.170** he prays “deliver me.” This is an example of synthetic parallelism where the second line intensifies the first.<sup>5</sup> So the request to “deliver me” in **v.170** intensifies or amplifies the request to “give me understanding” in **v.169**. In other words, these aren't two different requests, it is the same request for understanding. And we know this is the case because of **v.171**. *Why* does he praise God? “My lips will pour forth praise, *for* [or because] you teach me your statutes.” He praising God, *because* God gave him what he requested—an understanding.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Source: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/parallelism/> accessed January 4, 2020

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> We see the same thing in v.172, what is he singing about? God's word “for all your commandments are right.”

### Why this intensification?

But it is vital to see *why* the Psalmist intensified this request in **v.170**. If we put them both together, it would sound like this “Lord, *if* you give me understanding *then* I will be delivered.” What a strange thing to say. But the Psalmist understands that the first thing he needs is deliverance from a darkened mind. Oh dear saint this is why Paul prays for the church the way that he does in the NT over and over again. **Ephesians 1:16-18**

“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may *give you* the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, *having the eyes of your hearts enlightened*, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you...”

Christians forget the hope to which they have been called to. And because that, we grow praise-less.<sup>7</sup> We can't praise what we don't see.

### Telescope of glory

This last year a friend invited me to his house to look through his telescope at midnight on a Friday night. When I started putting on my shoes, I asked myself “Why did I agree to this?” When I got there he had me look at Jupiter which to the naked eye looked just like a star. But when I looked through the telescope a new world appeared. I could see the red dot on Jupiter's surface—that anticyclonic storm—which is at least 340 years old.<sup>8</sup> And my heart leapt. I felt infinitely small and infinitely glad at the same time. He then had me look at what's called M13 in the constellation Hercules. To the unaided eye, it looked like white fuzz on a black canvas, but through the telescope I could see glory. M13 a great globular cluster of 300,000 stars in our own galaxy, a mere 22,200 light years away. It was glorious. My friend

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<sup>7</sup> Instead of singing the songs of the Lord, we are lured away like Odysseus by the song of the sirens

<sup>8</sup> Source: [https://www.sciencedaily.com/terms/great\\_red\\_spot.htm](https://www.sciencedaily.com/terms/great_red_spot.htm) Accessed January 4, 2020

delivered me from the monotony of my own eyes and through His telescope I beheld other-worldly beauty.

### **Am I asking God to look through His telescope?**

Dear congregation you need to be delivered from your darkened mind. Don't you realize you were redeemed in order to behold other-worldly beauty? Everything else is of secondary importance. Nothing is more desirable than to see and savor Jesus Christ in His Word. But how will you see and savor? Only through the Holy Spirit giving you sight! It is the peculiar work of the Holy Spirit to help you see Christ.<sup>9</sup> Jesus said in **John 16:14** "He will glorify me, *for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*" You and I must be taught by the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup> And the Holy Spirit is accessed only through prayer. So ask yourself: Am I asking God to look through His telescope? Am I asking the Holy Spirit to give me understanding? To deliver me from the darkness of my own mind? This is such a vital point that cannot be simply brushed said. I fear that the church is robbed of so much celebration in song, because as individual Christians we often neglect our secret meetings with the Lord. If we are privately cold with the Lord, is it any mystery why we would be publicly cold with Him? Neglecting private duties will lead to the loss of public delights. We cannot sing if we do not see.

That's our **first point**. What do we need to truly sing to the Lord? The Holy Spirit must give us sight to see other-worldly things. So must must go to Him in prayer as the Psalmist does. Lord give me understanding, deliver me from the darkness of my mind.<sup>11</sup> That is the primer for singing.

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<sup>9</sup> "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Corinthians 2:14

<sup>10</sup> Charles Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2011), pg. 76

<sup>11</sup> "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Psalm 119:18

## II. The Practice of Singing

### **My tongue will sing!**

Now we see how the Psalmist responds to being able to see through the telescope of glory. Please look with me at **v.171-172**. He says “My lips will pour forth praise, for you teach me your statutes. My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right.” Let’s consider five things the Psalmist means by singing here.

#### **1. Singing is part of our nature**

Notice the Psalmist says “*My lips...praise...My tongue will sing.*” Our body was designed to sing. The Getty’s in their book *Sing* said “Around the twelve-week mark, the vocal cords of a baby going in the womb are in place and have been shown to work long before the baby is born. We may sound different, but each of us has the same vocal apparatus—breath flowing up from our lungs, vibrating sound out through the articulators of our mouths, tongues and lips. Singing is not merely the happy by-product of God’s real intent of making us creatures who can speak. It is something we’re designed to be able to do.”<sup>12</sup> But beyond our biological makeup, psychologically we were irresistibly drawn to singing. Even if we can’t sing well, we are wired to sing. Just observe children 3-4 years old. Watch “...how they walk around the house while singing at the same time.”<sup>13</sup> Singing is part of our nature.

#### **2. Singing is a conscious activity**

The Psalmist is not passively engaging in singing. He’s talking about singing, planning on singing, giving reasons for singing. In other words, he is consciously engaging in it. This is vital to see. I said earlier that creation itself sings to the glory of God. **Psalm 98:8** says “...the rivers clap their hands...the

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<sup>12</sup> Keith and Kristyn Getty, *Sing!: How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church*, (Nashville, TN.: B & H Publishing Group, 2017), pg. 2

<sup>13</sup> Wilhelmus A Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service, Vol. 4: Ethics and Eschatology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1995), pg. 35

hills sing for joy together before the LORD.” But this is of course poetic language illustrating how creation can’t help but act as a window into that unseen realm. It sings, if you will, passively or unconsciously. But true singing is a sober awareness of how great and glorious God is. God condemns worship that is passively going through the motions. He says in **Isaiah 29:13** “...this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me.” True singing is a conscious act.

### 3. Singing is a compulsive response

Notice that the Psalmist erupts into praise compulsively. He praises in v. 171. Why? Because God *taught him*. He says “for you teach me.” God acted upon His soul. He sings in v.172. Why? Because *now* he *sees*—he sees that God’s commandments are righteous and true and beautiful like God Himself. And he can’t help himself. It’s like when you get a physical at the doctor and he takes that little hammer out and hits your knee and your foot kicks. Your foot can’t help it, the hammer hit a nerve, it must respond. That’s how true worship works. When God acts upon your soul, the compulsive response is praise and song. Look how he describes it. He says in v.171 “My lips *pour forth* praise...” You could render it literally ‘my lips gush forth...’<sup>14</sup> He gushes praise spontaneously like an oil reserve gushes forth when it is struck.<sup>15</sup>

If praising and singing to the Lord is not a compulsive to you, it’s because you aren’t enjoying Him. We praise things all the time that we enjoy. C.S. Lewis keenly observed “...*all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise*...The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players their favorite game...”<sup>16</sup> What Lewis

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 6:45 “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

<sup>15</sup> This imagery helps those of us who maybe can’t sing. There are mute Christians who are waiting to get their voice in Heaven. But singing is a deep motion of the heart before it’s a motion of the lips. During our Christmas Service, I was standing next to a woman who was signing all the songs. And it was powerful. She was singing with her hands and her heart. Or perhaps you are embarrassed of your voice because you think you have the spiritual gift of singing out of tune.

<sup>16</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Beloved Works of C.S. Lewis*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Family Christian Press), pg. 179



says here is profound. “We can’t help but praise and rejoice in what we enjoy most.”<sup>17</sup> You don’t praise persecution. You don’t praise tyranny. Why? Because you don’t enjoy those things. When you don’t praise God, it’s because you are not enjoying Him.

How do you recover? Go back to our first point. Beg the Holy Spirit to be delivered from the darkness of your mind. Singing needs Divine assistance.<sup>18</sup> When Paul is addressing the church in Ephesus, he makes this exact point. He says in **Ephesians 5:18-19** “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, *but be filled with the Spirit*, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” Do you see? You cannot sing and make melody to the Lord with your heart, *unless* you are filled with the Holy Spirit.

When that happens, when Holy Spirit fills you, and gives your mind a clear view of the gospel: how you were once dead in your sin, a vessel fit for destruction, a stranger of the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, *but then* Your Prince—the Captain of Your salvation—Jesus Christ took ahold of you, and drew you up from the pit of destruction and set your feet upon a rock. And He gave You His great and precious promises— He brought you into union with Himself, adopted you into His family, washed away all your sins, gave You His perfect righteousness, made you a temple of the Holy Spirit, promised you that the gates of hell will never prevail against you, promised you that you will never perish but have eternal life, promised you that nothing not even death itself can ever separate you from His love—when those things become clear in your mind, singing becomes compulsive.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sam Storms in *For the Fame of God’s Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, Ed. by Sam Storms and John Piper, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2010), pg. 63

<sup>18</sup> The Psalmist repeats this point. Immediately after his resolve to sing, he says in **v.173** “Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.” He’s saying ‘God I’m yours, I’ve taken your Word as my Word, I’ve put my hope in you, no please help me to praise You.’

<sup>19</sup> This is why the Psalmist says in v.174 I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight.” The more He is filled with the Holy Spirit to see Christ, the more He longs to be with Him in consummation.

#### 4. Singing is a corporate act

The Psalmist uses the word “praise” in v.171 “My lips will pour forth *praise*.” Every time this same word<sup>20</sup> is used in the Psalms, it is always in the context of corporate worship. **Psalm 22:25** “My *praise* shall be of You in the *great assembly*.”<sup>21</sup> **Psalm 149:1** “*Praise* the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his *praise* in *the assembly of the godly!*” That is not to say that we can’t or shouldn’t sing privately. That’s not the point. God is certainly glorified when we sing privately. However God receives more glory in corporate song than He does when individuals sing to God alone.<sup>22</sup> Why? Because it involves more than one miracle. All individual worship is the result of the miracle of the new birth. But corporate worship is the result not only of the enmity between God and the individual being put away, but also the enmity between each other being put away. It puts on display more of the power of the gospel that once self-worshipping, self-absorbed people now come together to lift their voices to God together. That’s why **Psalm 87:2** says “the LORD loves the gates of Zion [*the gathering of the church*] more than all the dwelling places of Jacob [*the individual or the family gathering*].” Singing finds it’s fullest and most intended expression when it’s done corporately.

#### 5. Singing is the reason we exist<sup>23</sup>

Please look at v.175. The Psalmist says “Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me.” I think it’s unfortunate how the ESV rendered it here, because it almost sounds like he’s making three requests here:

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<sup>20</sup> tēhillah H8416

<sup>21</sup> NKJV

<sup>22</sup> Help here from John Piper’s *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2018), pg. 34

<sup>23</sup> Had I more space I would have loved to develop at least two more points: 1) Singing is a fitting response (Psalm 147:1) and 2) Singing is a command (Psalm 149:1). On the former see Piper’s *Expository Exultation* (pg.34ff); on the latter see Getty’s *Sing!* (ch. 2) or Brakel’s *Reasonable Service Vol. 4* (pg.35).

Request #1: Let my soul live.

Request #2: Let me praise you.

Request #3: Let your rules help me.

But that's *not* what he's saying. He's actually only making one primary request and the other two support it. The NASB gets the sense of it. It says "Let my soul live *that it may praise You*, and let Your ordinances help me." Do you see? Why does he want to live? So that He can praise the Lord. And it's the God's Word—His ordinances (NASB) or His rules (ESV) that helps him to do so. Dear congregation, you and I exist to sing, to praise, to bring glory and honor to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. That's why we were redeemed. **1 Peter 2:9** says "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Yet we would be under-interpreting this verse were we to say, that it's merely God's design for us to praise Him. No it's the saints highest delight to praise God. As one saint of old asked "For what besides (that) makes existence tolerable to a child of God?"<sup>24</sup> If the child of God is cut off from singing and making melody to the Lord, what is the point of living? In this sin ruined world, what is there for Christ's little lambs but praise? That's what the Christian lives for. Paul's main concern as he sat in his Roman prison, was not his freedom. It was the Christ be praised! **Philippians 1:20** "...it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death."

Dear congregation, have you discovered this about your life yet? That God's purpose for your life *and* your fullest, deepest, best, most satisfying joy is the *same thing*: the praising of God! The singing of His name! Making melody in your soul to Him. That's why music exists. That's why singing was invented.

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of Psalm 119*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2002), pg. 477

That's our **second point**. We saw five things essential to the practice of singing. 1) Singing is part of our nature; 2) Singing is a conscious activity; 3) Singing is a compulsive response; 4) Singing is a corporate act; and 5) Singing is the reason we exist.

### III. The Person of Our Singing

#### The shocking conclusion

How does this longest chapter in the entire Bible end? Shockingly. Please look at v.176 with me. He says "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments." In the midst of all of his singing, he confesses that he has strayed *again*, that he has sinned *again*, that he has become like a lost sheep *again*.<sup>25</sup>

#### The simile of sheep

So let's consider this simile carefully. He says "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." What do we know about sheep? **First**, sheep have a straying nature. Phillip Keller in his book "A Shepherd's Look at Psalm 23" confirmed the straying nature of sheep. He had this beautiful ewe whom he called "Mrs. Gad-about" and she what was what he called a fence crawler. He said this: "Now matter what field or pasture the sheep were in, she would search the fences...looking for a loophole she could crawl through and start to feed on the other side. It was not that she lacked pasturage...No sheep in the district had better grazing...She was simply never contented with the way things were."<sup>26</sup> Dear believer, to our shame, God invented sheep to show us our straying nature. **Isaiah 53:6** "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to

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<sup>25</sup> I know that John Calvin takes a different view here—namely that the Psalmist is in danger from forces from without—the wolves of this world—and not from the dangers from within, namely his own sin. I made some notes in his commentary on this verse.

<sup>26</sup> Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd's Look at Psalm 23*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pg. 32-33

his own way.” But it’s not just pre-salvation that we have this nature. It’s post-salvation as well. The Psalmist is not reflecting on the past before he was saved. He’s confessing his current straying. As the great hymn goes “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.”

**Second**, when sheep become lost, they cannot find their way back. When dogs get lost, they can find their way home, but sheep can’t. You see this in Luke 15 when Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep, that it is the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine in the open country and goes after the one that is lost until he finds it. Why? Because a lost sheep cannot make it home on its own. As Augustine said “Lord, I could go astray by myself, but I cannot return of myself.”<sup>27</sup>

### What do we make of this?

So what are we to make of this shocking ending? Two things. **First**, this unexpected ending is evidence *itself* that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant and infallible Word of God. We have been peering into the heart of this eminent saint, this man whom loved God with an other-worldly love, who praised Him in the middle of the night, who hated evil, who loved the saints. This journal of his life has been so heavenly at times that perhaps we have like we are not Christians at all. But then we hear this confession—he exposes the evil of his heart, the natural depravity of his nature, and the “...perpetual tendency to wander from his God”<sup>28</sup> and we remember he is just like us. Far from a pie-in-the-sky portrait of the Christian life, we are reminded that God “knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust” (**Psalm 103:14**).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton Vol. 9*, (Miami, FL.: Hardpress Publishing), pg. 302

<sup>28</sup> Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of Psalm 119*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2002), pg. 481

<sup>29</sup> “Yet let the reader still remember the first verse of the psalm while he reads the last. The key blessedness lies not in being restored from wandering, but in being upheld in a blameless way even to the end.” Charles Spurgeon, *The Golden Alphabet: An Exposition of Psalm 119*, (USA.: Aneko Press, 2018), pg. 268

**Secondly**, this unexpected ending is evidence *itself* of the truth of the gospel. The Psalmist calls himself a lost sheep. But a lost sheep *implies* that there is a Shepherd.<sup>30</sup> The great prophecy of this Shepherd in the OT is found in **Ezekiel 34**. There God condemns the false prophets and teachers of Israel who instead of caring for the sheep made mutton of them and scattered them making them wander over all the face of the earth. But what does God say? “For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out<sup>31</sup>...I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed<sup>32</sup>... And I will set up over them one shepherd<sup>33</sup>...” Who is this Shepherd? None other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He declared of Himself: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (**John 10:11**). We are not in the hands of a hireling who does not own the sheep, who when he sees the wolf coming leaves the sheep and flees. No! We are in the hands of Almighty God, the Son of God, God Himself, and He has said “...this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day” (**John 6:39**). Dear loved one, Jesus Christ has promised that your straying nature, that your getting yourself lost *again*, will not prevent Him from saving you. His cross declares “It is finished.” The victory has already been won. Sin and death and hell have already been defeated. Your arriving in the safe pastures of Heaven doesn’t depend on you *not* getting lost. It depends on the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, who as Paul said “loved me and gave himself for me” (**Galatians 2:20**).

### **The songs of the church**

Dear congregation, it is for this reason that Jesus Christ who has become our peculiar and unique song. The saints in Heaven and on earth don’t worship

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<sup>30</sup> Psalm 23 “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” et. al. Ezekiel 34:31 “And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord God.”

<sup>31</sup> v.11

<sup>32</sup> v.16

<sup>33</sup> v.23

God generically. What makes our songs so unique is that they are drenched in the blood of the cross and singed with the fires of hell. We sing to Jesus, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all our sins. The church *alone* "... addresses one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody *to the Lord*."<sup>34</sup> That is, to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews worship a distorted view of God from the OT. The Muslims worship Allah. It is the church alone that directs her song to to Jesus.

### **Our songs reach Heaven when they come to the cross**

Dear congregation haven't you noticed that in all our singing, our songs reach Heaven, when they come to the cross? Consider the song "All Creatures of Our God and King" It begins:

All creatures of our God and King  
 Lift up your voice and with us sing  
 O praise Him! Allelujah!  
 Thou, burning sun with golden beam  
 Thou, silver moon with softer gleam  
 O praise Him! O praise Him!  
 Allelujah! Allelujah! Allelujah!

Is that the pinnacle of the song? No. That comes in the third stanza

All the redeemed washed by His blood  
 Come and rejoice in His great love  
 O praise Him! Allelujah!  
 Christ has defeated every sin  
 Cast all your burdens now on Him  
 O praise Him! O praise Him!  
 Allelujah! Allelujah!

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<sup>34</sup> Ephesians 5:19

Or consider the song “How Great Thou Art.” The hymn writer begins with the glories of creation. He says

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder  
 Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,  
 I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,  
 Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

As glorious as creation is, is that the main show? No creation is just the warm up act. He says

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,  
 Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;  
 That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
 He bled and died to take away my sin...

Dear congregation, Jesus Christ is the reason we sing. Every other song is as dust on the scales. That’s our **last point**. Jesus Christ is the song of the ages.

## Application

### 1. What kind of a world do we live in?

We live in a world whose singing is very different from our own. The world—that is the world in rebellion to God—can indeed make beautiful songs. No one can deny this. But there is a fundamental difference between beauty of the world’s songs and the beauty of the Christian church’s songs.<sup>35</sup> The difference is in what they sing *about*. What does the world sing about? They sing about themselves. Man is at the center of the world’s songs. That is the vital difference in how the world sings. But the most frightening thing is that

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<sup>35</sup> Help here from MLJ’s sermon “Singing to the Lord” from Ephesians 5:19 found at [mljtrust.org](http://mljtrust.org)



one day these songs will come to an end forever. Dear friend, if you are here this morning and you have never from your heart sung to Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, then you are still dead in your sins. Oh how dreadful. Do you realize that one day all your singing will come to an abrupt end. All those who die in their sins will never sing again. There's no singing, no melody, no music in hell. There's just weeping and gnashing of teeth. That's what sinners deserve. For refusing to sing to our great and mighty and merciful and holy God, sinners deserve to be cast into outer darkness forever.

But the promise of salvation is for anyone who will receive it this morning. Jesus invites you to take hold of Him. He says "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (**John 6:35**). If you trust in Christ, the Scripture promises that God will put a new song in your heart (**Psalms 40:3**), a song that you will never stop singing for all eternity. You will be able to sing of the Lamb who has taken away your sins. You will be able to sing of Him who loved you and gave Himself up for you (**Galatians 2:20**).

## 2. What kind of a Word has God given us?

A word that helps us sing! **Colossians 3:16** 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.*" Paul connects our singing to the Word. If the word of Christ dwells in us richly, then we will sing deeply. But what's the connection between the two? Simply this. The Word is a window into Heavenly glories. It is a window into the world of Christ, and all the glories of the gospel. You can't sing about these things if you don't see them. God has given us this Word so that you can see and sing about His Son.

### 3. What kind of a church should we want?

We should want a singing church. Singing is one of the primary means that God uses to defeat the darkness, to evangelize the lost, and to edify the saints.

**First**, singing is one of God's means of defeating the darkness.

In **2 Chronicles 2:22** we read that when King “Jehoshaphat together with his army, lifted up their voices in joyous exclamation and song, the Lord defeated their enemies. When Paul and Silas sang praises unto God in the middle of the night, the doors of the prison were opened and the [chains] of all the prisoners were [unfastened] (**Acts 16:25-26**).” Singing is deadly to the darkness. William Brakel wrote that “The [Catholic Church] in France [during the Reformation] knew this and therefore they strictly forbade the singing of psalms and meted out cruel punishment for this—even prior to massacring the church.”<sup>36</sup> Jan Huss one of the predecessors of Luther “...was martyred for (among other things) speaking the “heresy of congregational singing.”<sup>37</sup> Singing is dangerous to the darkness because is a proclamation to the universe that Christ is supreme!

**Second**, singing is one of God's means of evangelizing the lost.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones tells the story of church service he preached at in Wales in the 1950's. It was the first time that some of the boys who attended heard real singing.

“The tiny chapel, which scarcely held fifty people when full, would have half of its congregation made up of cockney lads who were ignorant of any form of church worship...the boys first astonishment as the service began was the volume and the fervor of the singing that burst forth. After an

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, pg. 36

<sup>37</sup> Keith and Kristyn Getty, *Sing!: How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church*, (Nashville, TN.,: B & H Publishing Group, 2017), pg. xxiii

uncertain giggle, they saw that many of the men of the valley were there and...singing loudly.”<sup>38</sup>

The boys were astonished at singing. That’s how true singing affects the watching world. Have you thought about that? When the saints saint with the fervor and joy of the Lord, it becomes manifest to the lost that following Jesus Christ is a joyous life rather than a dull and dreary life. Conversely poor singing, communicates that following Jesus is like a funeral dirge. What does your singing say?

**Third**, singing is one of God’s means of edifying the saints!

Paul says in **Ephesians 5:19** that we are to “...*address one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” Why? Because singing builds up the church. Singing builds up the church in a way that preaching and the sacraments can’t. Certainly you have felt this before. Last week I heard two men’s voices very distinctly while we were singing “All Glory Be To Christ.” And I saw—with my spiritual eyes—a greater worth of Christ because of their volume and their joy. Their singing strengthened my very soul. That’s one of the best things about Shepherd’s conference every year. 5,000 men singing their hearts out to the Redeemer. The singing alone is worth going.

Dear congregation, don’t you realize that to singing small is a picture of a small soul. Little singing is consistent with lukewarmness at best<sup>39</sup> and self-righteousness at worse. Jesus said in **Luke 7:47** that those who know that they have been forgiven much love much. Certainly we can conclude that the more a heart knows of the mercy they have received, the more praise comes from their

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<sup>38</sup> Iain Murray, *D. M. Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 374

<sup>39</sup> Wilhelmus A Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service, Vol. 4: Ethics and Eschatology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1995), pg. 35

lips. It is those who think very little of their sin, who sing very little.<sup>40</sup> “If you have no desire to sing, then what will you do in...heaven?”<sup>41</sup>

Or perhaps you sing small because you think you sing very poorly. The question Jesus asks is not “Can you sing well?” But “Do you love me?” Do you realize what others must conclude if they hear you sing? Wow, they must really love Jesus if they are willing to sing. Dear congregation, that’s part of what it means to follow Jesus, to pick up your cross, to die to yourself and follow Him. That means in your singing as well. Don’t rob the congregation of your voice. Singing to one another is a duty God has given to you for the sake of the church. How many people will you strengthen in the church, simply by singing loudly and full of joy?

#### 4. What kind of Savior do we need?<sup>42</sup>

We need the kind of Savior that we will never grow weary of singing of. Beloved that’s Christ! Do you know why you will never grow weary of singing of Christ? Because Jesus will never grow weary of seeking after you. The Psalmist pleads with God in our last verse “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; *seek your servant...*” That verse is the banner over the rest of your life. You will continue to fall short, you will continue to sin, you will continue to fail Your Savior. But He will never fail You. He will always seek you out. He will never stop.

What patience would wait as we constantly roam  
 What Father, so tender, is calling us home  
 He welcomes the weakest, the vilest, the poor  
 Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more

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<sup>40</sup> Or perhaps you say ‘No I see my sin and my Savior, I just don’t want to sing.’ Piper goes on to say that “...seeing the spiritual beauty of biblical truth with savoring it is sin.” John Piper’s *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2018), pg. 25

<sup>41</sup> Wilhelmus A Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service, Vol. 4: Ethics and Eschatology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1995), pg. 36

<sup>42</sup> With the exception of the question on the Word, the other three are from Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross, Preaching the Word Series*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2014), pg. 17-23