



# Why Sing?

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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## Introduction:

Do you know what separates the saved from the rest of the world, what distinguishes us and makes us different? A song. In **Revelation 14:3**, as John saw a vision symbolic of God's servants, marked and set apart from those who were sons of disobedience, the Spirit included a distinction. The saints knew a song no one else knew. The purpose of my sermon is not to address all the nuances of this passage. I recognize there is specific application of this passage to the Christians in John's day, facing Roman persecution. However, I am still intrigued by this symbol chosen by the Spirit to distinguish the saved and the lost. The saved knew this song. The lost did not. Singing has long been a part of worshipping God, mentioned as early as **Exodus 15** and continues to be a part of worship today (**Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16**). I may not understand everything about the symbol in **Revelation 14:3**, but I understand this, what makes us different from the world is worshipping God, and when God wanted to symbolize that difference, He chose singing. The important place of singing in the life of the Christian and in the corporate worship of Christ's church is clearly demonstrated by this. And yet I think I may sometimes take singing for granted without fully appreciating its place in our spiritual lives. I'd like to share with you some things I've learned from God's Word about singing.

## Discussion:

### I. What was singing for?

- A. The most basic use of singing has always been to praise God, extolling His virtues, blessings, character, greatness, etc. Throughout the **Psalms**, statements about singing and praise are made (i.e. **Psalms 7:17**). Paul and Silas sang hymns of praise while imprisoned (**Acts 16:25**). Consider **Psalms 8** as an example of praising God in song.
- B. Akin to the praise offered God was the thanksgiving His followers offered. When the command to sing was written to Christians in **Colossians 3:16**, it was commanded to be with thankfulness in our hearts. The first song recorded in scripture is a song of thanksgiving for delivering the Israelites from Pharaoh through the Red Sea (**Exodus 15**). In **Judges 5**, the song of Deborah and Barak is also a song of thanksgiving.
- C. Singing has always been popular among mankind because it stems from, expresses, and evokes emotion. Thus, we should not be surprised to learn that singing, even in worship to God, has been used to express the emotions filling man's heart. The overwhelming emotion we see expressed is joy (**Psalms 5:11; 20:5**). The scripture presents singing as the natural expression of the joyful heart (**James 5:13**). But we also see despair (**Psalms 22:1**), sorrow, and regret (**Psalms 51**), etc.
- D. Singing was used to petition God. One of the most famous psalms, **Psalms 51**, was a petition for forgiveness. **Psalms 5** is another example, petitioning for God's help.
- E. The singing we have already described is worship. Therefore, we automatically consider it a Godward activity. However, there is a manward aspect to singing. As early as the conquest of Canaan, we see singing used to teach others. **Deuteronomy 31:19** says the song recorded in **Deuteronomy 32** was to be taught to the Israelites to be a witness for God against them. That is, it was teaching them something. Granted, in this situation it was prophetic, but nonetheless it was used to teach. Consider **Psalms 1**. Is it not a song of teaching? When Christians were commanded to sing, they were commanded to speak to one another in **Ephesians 5:19** and teach and admonish one another in **Colossians 3:16**.
- F. Finally, consider **I Chronicles 16:23**. While the ESV simply says to sing of God's salvation, the NKJV says to "proclaim the good news of His salvation" and the NASB says to "Proclaim good tidings of His salvation." Singing was used to proclaim the good tidings and good news of salvation. I recognize the context here is an Old Testament one. However, we can see a parallel for the New Testament. We have heard enough sermons and been in enough Bible classes to know that "gospel" means "good tidings" or "good news." Remember **Romans 10:15** about the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things. One way that was done was in song. Consider a clear example in **Acts 16:25**. We don't know the words Paul and Silas were singing. But it must have proclaimed some good news inciting the guard to ask how to be saved after the earthquake.
- G. Recognize this, when we sing, we are doing more than just singing. We are accomplishing something. We are working. We are praising and thanking God. We are proclaiming the Gospel to the lost and edifying the

saved. Have you found yourself asking, “What job is out there for me to do in the church?” How about start with singing and I mean really singing. With each song, ask, “What am I doing with this song? Am I praising, thanking, expressing emotion, petitioning, edifying, proclaiming?” Singing is not a punch card activity to mark off our list of duties. We sing to accomplish something. Consider what you are trying to do in the song and sing it that way.

## II. Why do we sing?

- A. One of the most eye-opening points about singing is the reason God’s worshippers gave for singing. No doubt this is not an exhaustive list of the reasons given, but I have compiled a list of 20. I will simply read these passages for you.
  - 1. **Exodus 15:1** – Because God has triumphed gloriously over the enemies.
  - 2. **II Chronicles 20:21** – Because God’s steadfast love endures forever.
  - 3. **Ezra 3:11** – Because God is good.
  - 4. **Psalms 5:11** – For joy.
  - 5. **Psalms 13:6** – Because God has dealt bountifully.
  - 6. **Psalms 20:5** – Because of salvation in God.
  - 7. **Psalms 47:7** – Because of God’s reign and rule.
  - 8. **Psalms 59:16** – Because of God’s strength.
  - 9. **Psalms 59:17** – Because of God’s protection.
  - 10. **Psalms 63:7** – Because of God’s help in our need.
  - 11. **Psalms 67:4** – Because of God’s righteous judgment
  - 12. **Psalms 71:23** – Because of redemption.
  - 13. **Psalms 98:1** – Because God has done marvelous things.
  - 14. **Psalms 119:172** – Because God’s commands are right.
  - 15. **Psalms 147:1** – Because it is good and pleasant.
  - 16. **Jeremiah 20:13** – Because of deliverance.
  - 17. **Zechariah 2:10** – Because of God’s presence.
  - 18. **Romans 15:9** – Because of God’s mercy.
  - 19. **Colossians 3:16** – For thanksgiving.
  - 20. **Hebrews 2:12** – To participate with Christ.
- B. When we sing, we must ask, “Why am I singing? Because it is that time in the service? Because God says I have to?” Check your motivation. Your singing will improve.

## III. What was sung?

- A. We are all very well versed in **Ephesians 5:19** and **Colossians 3:16**. The church was commanded to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. While some strive to make a distinction between these three terms, the simple fact is there is little difference. They each represent a song and simply that, nothing more and nothing less. As when Marc Antony spoke to the same group calling them at the same time, “Friends, Romans, countrymen ...”, so Paul says “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” but speaks of one thing: singing. However, these terms all demonstrate praise or singing things of spiritual value. We do not sing Top 40 hits; we sing spiritual songs of worship, praise, and edification.
- B. Going beyond these oft referenced verses, some Old Testament verses provide answers.
  - 1. **Exodus 15:2; Psalms 118:14** – The Lord was their song. Can we say “the Lord is my song?” What does this mean? Clearly, it demonstrates a topic of singing, the Lord; that is, His character, nature, essence, works. All things that were bound up in what God is and what He has done should be our song. But more than that, the point is God is the topic because it is God who makes us sing. Not by force or by command. Rather, because of who God is, we must sing. Singing is the natural response to God’s existence and work.
  - 2. **Psalms 119:172** – God’s Word was their song. Is it our song? Of course, the issue is not simply one of recitation of Scripture. Rather, it is singing songs which correspond with God’s Word. Singing songs which teach God’s will as He has revealed it in His Word. We do not propagate our own ideas in song. We must restrict ourselves to God’s will.

#### IV. How are we to sing?

- A. We often spend time answering how we are not to sing, that is we are not to sing with the accompaniment of mechanical instruments. The New Testament is clear and we are correct to teach and practice a cappella singing. My study has strengthened my understanding of this issue and my resolve.
1. What strengthened my resolve more than anything was not that I searched and searched the New Testament and could not find mechanical accompaniment anywhere. I already knew that. There is neither a command, a statement, an example, or even an implication of New Testament Christians worshiping God or edifying one another by using mechanical instruments of music. And that is a profoundly important point. However, what really strengthened my resolve was noting how the Old Testament viewed mechanical instruments and accompaniment. Mechanical accompaniment was not just a part of the singing in the Old Testament. It was not something that the Israelites did in response to commands to sing. The Old Testament is clear in its commands to sing along with mechanical accompaniment. **Psalm 98:5-6** is an example. Sing with the lyre and with the trumpets. The trumpet and lyre were not a part of the singing, they were things done in addition to and along with the singing. And they had their own separate command from God.
  2. Additionally the Old Testament recognized a clear distinction between singing and playing. In **I Samuel 18:6-7**, the verse says the women did three things: they played their tambourines and musical instruments, they danced their dance, and they sang their song. The word for “celebrate” in the ESV can specifically mean “to play (including instrumental music, singing, dancing).”<sup>1</sup> In fact, the KJV, NASB, and ASV all translate it “play.” Notice the distinction clearly made in **Psalm 87:7**. Unfortunately, the ESV renders the word “dancers.” However, in referring to music the word means “to play the flute or pipe.”<sup>2</sup> Further, it is translated “player on instruments” in the KJV and NKJV, “those who play the flutes” in the NASB, “will play flutes” in the NLT, “make music” in the NIV, “players on instruments” in Young’s Literal Translation. What we need to see is that there were those who sang and those who played. The Old Testament knew the distinction.
  3. Thus, in the New Testament we must ask, where are the numerous commands or examples for instrumental accompaniment? Is there even one? Actually there is. It is revealed in **Ephesians 5:19**. That instrument of melody is the heart. **Psalm 84:2** teaches that was also a part of Old Testament singing. We recognize it is the only accompanying instrument we find authorized in New Testament worship. But this is not the most important thing about how we sing.
- B. **Colossians 3:16** says we must sing with thankfulness in our hearts. That is, we must sing with an attitude of thanksgiving. Notice this passage speaks not just of a particular type of song, but of an attitude of heart accompanying all our singing, whether we are praising God in song or edifying our brother. We must be thankful that we are physically able to sing. We must be thankful that God allows us to sing to Him and one another. We must be thankful for all that we sing about. We must be thankful. What is in your heart when you sing? Bitterness or anger toward your brother? Apathy? Boredom? Resentment for the preacher? Irritation with the song leader because he is leading too slow, too fast, too high, or too low? What fills your heart when you sing? Make it thanksgiving.
- C. **I Corinthians 14:15** mentions singing with the spirit and with the mind. This passage is speaking in the specific context of spiritual gifts and their use in the assembly. Paul was saying that in the assembly tongues should not be used. His reasoning was the spirit is involved but there is no understanding. Because miraculous spiritual gifts are no longer used, the point of this passage regarding singing with the spirit does not apply to us. However, the rule that worship is something that is to be understood still clearly applies. When we sing, we must sing with understanding and understandably, so those around us can say “Amen.”
- D. That is not to say that our inner being, the seat of our emotions and feelings are not to be involved in our singing. **Ephesians 5:19** and **Colossians 3:16** both say they are when the heart is mentioned. We are not to be mouthing words. Rather, we are to be emotionally and spiritually involved in what we are singing.
- E. How do you sing?

#### V. Miscellaneous comments on singing.

- A. Considering all we have learned in this study, we recognize that singing is a natural response to salvation and God’s work for us and in us (**Romans 15:9**). We want to sing and enjoy singing, not because we are good at it. Not because it is fun. Not because it is pretty. Rather, because of what God is and has done. It is

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H7832&t=ESV>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H2490&t=ESV>

the natural response. It is one of those things that comes bounding forth out of our hearts like cheering when our favorite team wins the Super Bowl, but a thousand times greater. However, **Proverbs 29:6** implies in its contrasting statement that being in sin hinders our singing. That is, the one who gets involved in sin will rarely find that wellspring of motivation to sing. Perhaps the sin is bitterness and resentment with a brother, sister, preacher, or elder in the church. Perhaps the sin is selfishness in the home. Perhaps it is some moral sin. If you find that you are not joyously wanting to sing ... If you find yourself saying, "Oh man, its singing night...", examine your life. I recognize our own societal concepts of singing may cause some, who are not in sin, not to participate with enthusiasm. If that is your case, consider these verses, recognize the message you are sending out, and correct your action.

- B. Having said the above, just because we enjoy singing and do it with enthusiasm does not mean we are right with God. There are religious people worldwide who sing. They hold up their hands and when you witness their singing even the strongest in the doctrine of Christ are tempted to say that truly these have a relationship with God that might rival even the apostles' relationships with God. Yet, they are lost and on a path to a devil's hell. **Isaiah 24:16** demonstrates this. They were singing "Glory to God." They thought their relationship was strong or thought their singing and praise would make it so, but the righteous said "Woe is me." Because in reality the world was dealing treacherously. Sing. Sing with all your heart. But don't believe just because you sing praises you are right with God.
- C. Singing holds a unique place in our worship today. One that when we realize it, we are shocked by those who do not participate enthusiastically. We are shocked by those who will skip a fifth Sunday night service because "all" we are doing is singing. Singing is the only part of our worship wherein each of us has the ability to participate equally. The leader may start the song, but he does not sing more than we do. The same people who don't participate, often want to know what work they can do for the church. These same people want to know how to teach. These same people want to know how to pray. Start by singing with the congregation. When we sing these songs, your voice may not be as pretty as the person next to you, but we are not performing. When we sing these songs, you are on the same playing field as everyone else. You are teaching. You are praising. You are proclaiming. You are petitioning. You are not just being led in it. You are doing it. And you are doing it with Christ (**Hebrews 2:12**).
- D. As we conclude, I throw this grain out to you. One thing I found interesting, almost amusing was another word that was often related to singing in the Old Testament. Can you see the word in **Psalms 47:1; 65:13; 71:23; 81:1**? I bring this up not to say we are commanded to be really loud and shout out the words at the top of our lungs. Rather, I bring this up to point out that mumbling is never linked with singing, so I encourage you to sing out. As Isaiah counsels in **Isaiah 42:10-12**, let us sing aloud and shout, praising and giving glory to God.

## Conclusion:

For those who are not Christians already, you have had nothing to sing about today. Oh, you may have participated in the songs and may have enjoyed them, but you had no real reason to sing. I would like to encourage you to change that. Submit to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will be able to go on your way rejoicing as the Ethiopian eunuch did in **Acts 8:39**. And you will have reason to sing. Maya Angelou claimed she knew why the caged bird sings. I know why the freed Christian sings, and I want you to know as well. Why not submit today?