

Why sing Psalms

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[0 : 00] Ephesians chapter 5, verses 18 to 21.

Be not drunk with wine, where in a success, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns in spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things and to God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

So continuing your theme of worship, remember that we were saying that worship is a holy conversation. It's a holy conversation in which, first of all, God speaks to us, and then we speak to God.

We notice that God speaks to us in the reading of the word and then in the preaching of the word. We are to give understanding and then we are to address God in prayer as we saw last week.

Prayer, remember, we looked at, first of all, the content of the prayer. Prayer, that is, God, it's got to be scriptural for those things that the Lord himself would will.

[1 : 24] For those who find it hard, who pray, remember that there are many places and people from whom you can learn. You can go to the Bible to look at the many prayers.

I think we counted the word of 85 original prayers in the Bible itself. These can be a help to us. Verses of scripture themselves, when you learn to pray through them as you meditate on them, these can be a help to you in prayer.

When you're hearing the Lord's prayer and you're using that as a model of new prayer, that can be very useful. When you're hearing mature Christians pray, those who have been on the road for a while, that can be very instructive for ourselves as we learn from them.

Then about the manner of prayer, that we were to pray very much with reverence, because God is a God of majesty. He is always the consuming fire, and even of our Father, He is always our Father in heaven.

He is so holy. We've got to be very careful how we approach Him, but we must approach Him with the boldness of Son, with confidence, with expectancy. Then we must also remember the length of prayer.

[2 : 41] There's nothing wrong with long prayer. There are many of those in the scripture that remember that in long prayer, people's mind can drift away. There's nothing wrong with short prayer.

And in many ways, that will help you to focus your mind. It will help those who may lead in prayer to focus their mind in your prayer also.

There's so much for prayer. Tonight we want to look at praise. Now do remember that we are dealing with public worship. It's not worship in total, it's public worship in particular.

So when we're talking about praise here, we're talking about public praise. But it's praise in song that we are talking about. Now we can address God in praise, or we can address one another in praise before God.

We can address Him directly and praise God, or we can be encouraging one another in the praise before God. What do we use?

[3 : 51] Some churches sing psalms only, like our own church, the Presbyterian Church, the Associated Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church, and so on.

The vast, vast majority of people will sing psalms and hymns. They will sing the inspired psalms in the scriptures, and they will also sing human compositions that are called hymns or choruses.

Some of these hymns are exceedingly beautiful, really beautiful. I love some of these hymns. Who couldn't love Immanuel's Lamb?

Who couldn't love Jehovah's that came? Who couldn't love that beautiful one, sing of the host a hundred thousand times?

Who couldn't love this amazing grace? Not the tune, but the word. These are very beautiful words. Now, some ways you might say it's no wonder that the church, virtually worldwide, have taken to singing both hymns and choruses, either in English or in whatever translation, because they are very beautiful.

[5 : 13] Why should we sing psalms only then? Why should we sing psalms only? I want to answer that question over the next couple of weeks.

I want to give an answer. I know some will not agree with it, but this is truly what I believe. The first reason why we should sing psalms in our praise to God is that they are inspired.

Nobody would ever deny that. Every single psalm you have in the book of psalms is inspired. And even when they are translated so that you are putting them into meter to get rhymed, even though psalms the content of them is still inspired.

Nobody here would deny that. The Bible would be incomplete without the book of psalms. Nobody would deny that. Even the greatest hymn singing church would never deny that the book of psalms is inspired.

What's the first thing? The second reason why we should sing psalms in our praise is that the Old Testament believers sang psalms.

[6 : 37] They sang this psalm in the Old Testament that was part of the worship. They sang inspired psalms.

Some of those are not in the psalm. For example, in Exodus 15, remember, Pharaoh and the army of Pharaoh had been overthrown in the waters of the Red Sea.

Remember, the Israelites had fled out of Egypt. The Lord seemed to be leading them. And yet, when he led them, it was into a corner. And there was a sea before them.

They would drown as it would go over. And the army of Pharaoh were sitting behind. What was going to happen? The Lord opened their way through the sea. The Israelites went through on dry ground.

Pharaoh and his army came after them. But the waters were led then by God over those people. And they drowned. And the people of Israel sang in Exodus 15.

[7 : 38] They sang a beautiful song. A song such as we will one day sing when we are brought home to glory. You can look at Deuteronomy 32 and 33.

Another song composed by Moses under the inspiration of the Spirit. In Exodus 5, you find Deborah's song and so on. Habakkuk 2, you find another song.

So you do find songs that are not in the book of Psalms and the people of Israel sang them. But remember this, they were all inspired.

They were all inspired. But the book from which they sang most was of course the book of Psalms.

In Hebrew, the name for the book of Psalms is Tihlim, which literally means songs of praise. Songs of praise. Now it's natural that they would use the Psalms.

[8 : 40] Why? When you look at the Psalms, you can even see by their structure, they are what people you know about these things, they call them lyrical poetry. They're not just poetry, but they are lyrical poetry.

And even their very structure leads you to thinking that they should be sung. But their content, their content, first of all, calls you to praise.

Praise ye the Lord. The last five Psalms in the Bible begin with that. Hallelujah. Praise ye the Lord.

Let us have commands. And then the words are given with which to praise and the reasons for which we are to praise the Lord. We are so highly devotional to the book of Psalms.

In 2 Chronicles 29 and verse 30, we read these words. Moreover, King Hezekiah, this is during the reformation of Hezekiah, King Hezekiah and the leaders commanded the Levites to sing praise to the Lord with the words of David and of Asa the spear.

[9 : 52] The words of David and the words of Asa. These are what we have basically in the book of Psalms. In Esther 3 verses 10 to 11, if I can read some of these passages to you.

I read it just to impress upon us the fact that the Old Testament believers clearly sang Psalms. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they said to priests in their apparel with trumpets and the Levites, the sons of Asa with symbols, to praise the Lord after the ordinance of David, King of Israel.

And they sang together by Cush in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord because he is good for his mercy endures forever toward Israel.

and all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. I quote there from Psalm 136 as they laid the foundation for the temple after their backsliding.

They praised the Lord with the word of the book of Psalms. So you wouldn't deny, would you, that the Old Testament believers sang the book of Psalms to sing from the Psalms.

[11 : 25] The third reason why we should sing Psalms is that the Lord and his apostles sang the Psalms. Remember that Jesus Christ was a Jew and all the apostles were Jews as well.

Jesus, remember, went up when he was 12 years old to the Passover feast at Jerusalem and do you know what Psalms they would have sung at the Passover feast?

They're told they were the Hallel Psalms. Psalms 113 to 118. They would sing those Psalms when they gathered for the Passover and Jesus Christ as a 12-year-old lad would have sung these Psalms perfectly and from his heart.

Meaning every word what a privilege it would have been to have heard Jesus singing the Psalms. It would have been a privilege. Yes, the Lord Jesus sung the Psalms.

We have no record of him singing anything but Psalms. In Acts 2 you find that the church is there praising God.

[12 : 44] They're not told what they were praising or at least what was the words that they were using. But we assume they were the book of Psalms.

But then when you come to Acts in chapter 16 Acts 16 one of the more well-known portions of the book of Acts when Paul and Silas were in the prison in Philippi.

Do you remember during the night in the deepest darkest dungeon they were in prison? And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God.

Literally it means they sang hymns unto God and the prisoners heard them. They were there in Acts 16 singing praise in the prison and they were singing hymns which I believe means singing psalms as I will explain in a moment.

1 Corinthians 14 and verse 26 a passage that explicitly deals with the public worship that it might be orderly.

[13 : 56] Paul himself gives the content of that worship. How is it then brethren when you come together every one of you have a psalm have a doctrine have a tongue have a revelation have an interpretation that all things be done unto edifying.

Singing a psalm was edifying and this was singing a psalm in a Gentile church in Corinth in Greece they were singing psalms.

In James 5 and verse 14 James writes these words and they are addressed to Christians all over is any among you suffering let him pray is anyone cheerful let him sing psalms.

So you have no doubt truly that the Lord Jesus himself and his apostle sang psalm and we are commanding others to do the same.

Did they sing no hymns by hymns meaning uninspired human compositions? Well some people say yes they did they quote two passages in scripture in particular the first one is in 1st Timothy 3 and verse 16 about God being manifest in the flesh and so on now you can read it yourself when you go home it's truth it's inspired it is poetry but whether it was sung I would not say I don't believe so myself the other passage that they quote is Philippians 2 verses 5 to 11 talking about Jesus Christ who was in the form of God taught himself to be equal to God but then he emptied himself making himself of no reputation and so on aye it's lovely poetry and some scholars say that they have a fragment of a hymn but there's nothing whatsoever in this context that tells you that that was sung or that it was a hymn in any way but it's lovely poetry but the big text or two big texts that people quote the first of all

[16 : 33] Ephesians 5 verse 19 which is the reason we read this chapter be filled with the spirit speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord and then in Colossians 3 16 as well that the word of Christ dwelling you richly in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord people take these two verses and they say there you have it psalms hymns spiritual songs the book of psalms they say humanly composed hymns and choruses psalms hymns and spiritual songs I don't blame the people for reading it that way in the 20th century because that's what psalms hymns and spiritual songs mean in the 20th century psalms is the book of psalms hymns are composed by people who have not been inspired by the spirit and spiritual songs are somehow grouped in with choruses i can understand 20th century people coming to that conclusion what i would ask is is that what paul would have meant when he spoke of psalms hymns and spiritual songs songs i'm going to give you some statistics and this is based largely on the work of professor john mary there are three words here of course as you know in greek first one is psalm psalms i say this before we go on we have an english bible here from cover to cover there's also a greek bible the old testament part is called the septuagint that's from genesis through to malachi and the new testament part is what we call the new testament bible in greek now that's what i mean by the greek bible and paul wrote in greek the word psalm in greek occurs 94 times in the whole of the greek bible old testament and new testament it occurs 87 times in the old testament 7 times in the new testament 78 of the occurrences of the word psalm are found in the book of psalms 67 of them in the titles to the book of psalms you know when you read in the book of psalms they've got titles before them well you'll find 67 of the uses of this word psalm in the titles of the psalm okay the second word is the word hymnos the word hymn it occurs 19 times in the whole of the greek bible old testament and new it occurs 17 times in the old testament 2 times in the new testament 14 of the 17 occurrences in the old testament

are found in the book of psalms 6 of all in the titles of the psalms okay out of 17 in the old testament 6 of the uses of this word hymn are found in the title of psalms okay that's a very valid statistic the other uses are talking about the songs of science or general references to praise the third word is the word for song it's a word from which we get the word ode it occurs 86 times in the whole greek bible 80 times in the old testament 6 times in the new testament of the 80 occurrences of the word song in the old testament 45 of them are in the book of psalms 36 of them in the titles of psalms so for Paul to say you're singing psalms people would have thought of the book of psalms singing hymns it would not surprise me if they would have thought of the book of psalms as well and as for song definitely 36 of the titles called the psalms song the verb to sing a hymn who knell that is the one verb that Jesus

Christ or it's used concerning Jesus Christ and the apostles remember they were in the upper room and they were there eating the Passover now remember what I said the psalms that the Jews sang at the Passover and this is recognised by everybody they're psalms 113 to 118 and when we read that they sang a psalm and then went out the verb they sang a hymn and it was referring probably to psalm 118 and it was called a hymn so when you find Paul and Silas in the prison at Philippi singing hymns that to Paul and Silas being orthodox Jews would have meant singing psalms you see we mustn't bring our 20th century connotation of words back into the first century and push

Paul to use them the way we use them today in any case spiritual songs must be songs given by the spirit inspired by the spirit just as you find in 1 Corinthians 2 as we shall see in the weeks to come words inspired by the spirit spiritual words therefore spiritual songs are songs inspired by the spirit Ephesians 5 verse 19 now in Colossians 3 and verse 16 the parallel passage I'm sure you'll have found that much of Ephesians is found in Colossians in Ephesians 3 8 Colossians 3 and verse 16 let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another in psalms hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your heart to the

Lord now the only significant addition there is let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another in psalms hymns and spiritual songs the word of Christ surely must be the inspired word of God and surely that includes the book of psalms with which they were to teach and admonish one another with grace in your hearts to the Lord now I can't push this interpretation upon you I can't say that it was the interpretation from the first century right through virtually until the sixth century two very important points the Lord and the apostles sang psalms nobody disagrees but the second one is very important they did not compose uninspired hymns if anybody was going to compose hymns in our twentieth century jargon or choruses would it not have been these most spiritually minded of men

[25 : 58] Jesus Christ Paul the apostle Matthew Peter that you don't find even one hymn that they wrote none because they were content to sing the book of psalms among Jews and among those who were non-June Gentiles if they sang hymn where are they we have here in the Bible the record of their writings surely they would have passed on to us their hymns if they had written them but we don't we find no such things and even of those who came after the apostles those who lived in the post-apostolic age as we say where are their hymns they have their writings they have many of these

I could show you volume after volume after volume after volume of their writings but I can't find even a page of their hymns the earliest hymn we actually have so called goes back to the second century the very beginning written by a man called Clement and it was clearly written for edification and not for praise even those who believe in hymns agree with that so why should we sing psalms they are inspired by God the Old Testament believers sang them the Lord Jesus and his apostles sang them and the post-apostolic church also sang psalms those that came after the apostles they sang the psalms they also sang scripture songs they would take the words that Mary sang in praise of God when he gave her the child they would sing the words of

Simeon when he was wanting to depart in peace because his eyes had seen the salvation they would sing these kind of songs and the songs of Hannah yes they would sing scripture songs but by far it was the songs in the book of psalms that they sang and that's the way it continued until the 6th century the 7th century and then there was a council in a place called Toledo in Spain and that council reluctantly sanctioned the use of uninspired hymns what happened to make that take place what was it that brought the hymns into the church between the 3rd century say and the 7th century he said well I'll tell you there were heretics the first man was a man called

Bar de Sanis now you'll never have heard of him but he was a gnostic as they say which was a heretical sect of Christianity so called and Bar de Sanis didn't believe that Jesus was the son of God so he wrote hymns songs that his followers could sing in praise of Jesus Christ he was not divine so they used uninspired hymns because they had no inspired psalms that could agree with such a vile doctrine Bar de Sanis was in the church in Syria in the 2nd century then there was a man called Paul of Samosata he was in Antioch he was similarly minded he didn't believe Jesus was a divine person either so he composed hymns as well in praise of Christ who was not divine that's how it began any historian will tell you that's how it began it was the heretics who first composed uninspired hymns and then the orthodox people followed people like

Ambrose Hillary and even the great Saint Augustine they began to write hymns in praise of Christ God and man in order to battle against the heretics they said look at the heretics they're using these new hymns and spreading error so they said we will compose hymns to spread the truth and that's what they did they were singing psalms for 90% of the time perhaps but they were composing these uninspired hymns it was against much much opposition for nearly two centuries there was opposition in the church against the use of hymns but eventually they came in and they were sanctioned in 633 at the council of Toledo now that is my interpretation of how hymns came in since then up to our own day the church has virtually ceased to sing psalms perhaps some of you older people if you used to worship in the established church like the church of

[32 : 11] Scotland they used to sing did they not at least one or two psalms in their worship then it went down to one psalm at the beginning now you'll be hard pushed to find a church of Scotland that will sing psalms that's just the way it goes because it's far far easier to sing hymns than to sing psalms but the church has lost a great deal as well as being dishonoring to God as we shall see the church and the believers have lost a great deal because the psalms are wonderful they were sufficient for Christ they were sufficient for the apostles they were sufficient for the church virtually completely until the fifth century but today the church says we don't need them why why have we let these beautiful psalms go now let me turn things the other way

I wouldn't like people in the free church or in any other exclusively psalms singing churches to be proud in the wrong way yes we sing psalms yes we follow Christ in that we follow the apostles but having the psalms on their own and not meaning the words that we sing is just as dishonoring to God because I believe rightly or wrongly that many of us are singing the psalms clueless as to their meaning we are going through the form but the content is perhaps meaningless that's partly the fault of the translation of the psalms for singing as we have them they can be improved just as the book of psalms that we have is greatly improved in what was there first of all so let's be very careful that we don't have pride in the wrong things let us sing the psalms we have with grace in our heart now I don't enjoy speaking on these things but I do feel it's necessary to defend what I believe to be the truth and especially as we are doing a series on public worship in any case tonight was more historical and a fortnight's time it'll be more devotional because I will be arguing that the psalms are utterly unique there's nothing in the hymns that can ever match them beautiful though they are and my real earnest hope and prayer is that you people and myself will sing them from born again hearts that in the end of the day is everything in a moment we'll be talking about

Korea they don't sing psalms but boy they worship the Lord let us pray Lord our sovereign God be among us keep close to us grant Lord that the Holy Spirit would continue to inspire your own word so that we would see its truth and its relevance to us we know Lord God that you are the one who gave it to us and you are the one who can still make people hear it as the word of God and not as the word of men and we want to praise you in the way that is honouring to you we want to glorify you teach us Lord how to do it and go before us into the fellowship enable us to honour you we ask it in Jesus name Amen