

Why We Sing

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- [0 : 0 0] Who here doesn't like music? Put up your hand. Don't be shy. No one? No, I thought so. Everybody likes music.
- Everybody likes music. It's a universal thing. It doesn't mean you like all types of music. You may disagree with the definition of what constitutes music, but everybody likes some kind of music.
- Beethoven, if not Boyz II Men. It's part of creation. It's an amazing thing. We didn't invent music. We discovered it. God put music into creation.
- And music is a very special thing because it's a way that we connect on a deeper level than other things. And people, whether Christians or not, whether believers in God or not, have found a deep spiritual connection in music.
- And everybody would agree with that. It's a universal experience. And when we put words to music, I'm sure you'll agree with me, they become more than words, don't they?
- [1 : 0 6] When we put words to music, then we don't just hear the words, but we actually feel the emotions behind them. And music does that.
- It takes words and it gives us the feelings that inspired them. So if you think, for example, about lyrics of some popular songs, if I just said them, they wouldn't be the same as if they were sung and put to music, right?
- So for example, clap along if you feel like a room without a roof. Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth. Clap along if you know what happiness is to you.
- Clap along if you feel like that's what you want to do. Now, those words do make you think, yeah, I suppose that's what I want to do.
- But when they're sung by Pharrell Williams, they make you actually feel happy, don't they? Music does something that the words alone can't.
- [2 : 0 4] Or what about this? We are the champions, my friends. And we'll keep on fighting until the end. We are the champions.
- We are the champions. No time for losers. Yes, yes, just the words do something. They remind us that we are, in fact, the Rugby World Cup champions, aren't we?
- But I tell you, when we won the Rugby World Cup final in 2019, I didn't just say these words. I went to my car. I put on Freddie Mercury. I turned the volume up.
- And I sung these words because I wanted to feel our victory. Because music makes us feel, doesn't it? In a way that words alone can't.
- Well, I want to ask you this morning. If you're a Christian, is your salvation something you feel? Or is it just something you believe?
- [3 : 0 4] Have you ever considered that? Have you ever considered whether you really feel the truths that we are reminded of each Sunday?
- Or do you just think them? Do you just believe them? Yes, they're part of your life. You know these things happen. They're truths to you. But do you feel your salvation if you're a Christian?

Because here's the secret to living the Christian life properly. If you want to live the Christian life, your salvation is something you need to learn how to really feel.

To make alive in your soul. Rather than just believe. And that is why throughout the Bible, what you'll find is that God's people are told not just to speak about their salvation, but to sing about it.

And that is why the Bible is full of singing. Have you ever noticed how much singing there is in the Bible? In fact, one of the central and longest books in the Bible, Psalms, kind of right in the middle of the Bible, is a songbook.

[4 : 16] Those are songs. We don't quite get the feel of the Psalms, unless they're actually sung. That's why throughout Christian history, people have wanted to put the Psalms to music, because we've lost the original kind of Middle Eastern music that it was put to.

But those are songs. Our salvation is something that needs to be sung about. But I wonder if you know the first time that singing is ever mentioned in the Bible.

It's here in Exodus 15. Exodus 15, the passage we have in front of us, is the first time we come across singing. And this first song of many in the Bible in Exodus 15, the song of Moses, is a key song that pauses the narrative that we've been through so far, the adventures of Exodus, and the amazing events that we saw last week.

It pauses the narrative, and we read the whole chapter is this song. And so it's at a key time in what's going on in the Bible.

But as we look at this song this morning, and we're going to just look through some of the main points that the song brings out, we're going to discover why God's acts in this world are not just something that must be spoken about and believed, but they're things that must be sung.

[5 : 45] And so let's have a look at why we sing. Now there's three major movements, and I hope you have Exodus 15 open in front of you. There's three major movements in this song.

And we're going to look at each of them in turn and see the main kind of things that they bring out. The first part of the song is all about what God has done, the things that God has done from verse 1 to 5.

So let's read that. Then Moses and the Israelites sang the song to the Lord. They said, I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. He has thrown the horse and rider into the sea.

The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise Him, my Father's God, and I will exalt Him. The Lord is a warrior. The Lord is His name.

He threw Pharaoh's chariots and his army into the sea. The elite of his officers were drowned in the Red Sea. The floods covered them, and they sank to the depths like a stone. Now, you'll remember from last week, this is sung straight after one of the most epic moments in history, one of the most epic rescues in history that multiple movies have tried to capture what happened when God intervened in the natural order of things, and He caused a sea to open up.

[7 : 08] His people, the Israelites, who were slaves in Egypt, and who were being chased by the most powerful military in the world to kill them, passed through the sea, and then it closed again over this powerful military, wiping them out.

And we saw that all last week. But what we also saw, and I hope you remembered it from last week, I hope you picked it up, that God set this all up. He could have done it differently. He could have made it much easier.

There was another way for the Israelites to go, but He set it up that they would be trapped, and that the only way they could escape was for God to do something amazing.

And so it couldn't be mistaken for luck. God set this up so that nobody, not even the Egyptians, could mistake this for, oh, it was just lucky that the sea opened up. No. Nobody could deny this was God at work.

It was one of the times in history that God has undeniably intervened in the normal working of the world. And so, now we find the Israelites on the far bank.

[8 : 11] The seas have closed up on the Egyptian army, and they're looking back, and their hearts are pounding. And what is the first thing they do? They burst into song.

Because words alone will not do justice to what they've just seen. And the reason they burst into song, the reason that words are not enough, is because what they've just seen has, for the first time, convinced them, that God has not just spoken, but He's done something in our world.

He's intervened. He's come and done real things in our world. So, at that moment, and I think what caused them to burst into song, was that that moment, their faith suddenly is not just a religion anymore.

It's not just a bunch of propositions or ideas. It's based on something that's just happened in front of their eyes. Look at verse 2, and I think you get the sense of this in their song, especially in verse 2.

Look what they say. The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. The Hebrew, actually, for that, my song, can also be translated my music, which I just, I love that.

[9 : 42] The Lord is my strength and the Lord is my music. Isn't that great? And He has become my salvation. He has now become my salvation. In other words, what they're saying is that the God up there that I've known about, that my fathers have told me about, the God up there has now become my real salvation down here on earth.

And that's why they sing. That's why they sang. Because the God up there has become their salvation down here.

But that's also why we sing as Christians, for the same reason. And we sing the same song about what God has done on earth.

I wonder if you noticed when Gene read for us earlier Revelation 15, what is the song that the saints are singing in Revelation 15? You don't have to turn back there now, but can you remember?

It was the song of Moses. That's this song in Exodus. So the song of Exodus 15 is repeated in Revelation 15.

[10 : 52] It's the song of Moses, but there's something more. It's the song of Moses and the Lamb. In other words, God's people are singing the song of all that God has done right from the Exodus up until Christ.

All the things that God has done, all the ways He has intervened undeniably in history, starting with Moses, but culminating in the coming of Jesus, His death for the sins of His people and His bodily resurrection from the dead that actually happened, which was the ultimate intervention of God in history that cannot be denied and cannot be mistaken for lack.

And so the songs that the people of God are singing throughout Scripture from Exodus to Revelation are the things that God has actually done in this world. Not just songs about their feelings, but songs about actual events that God has done, actual ways He's intervened in what it means for us.

And that's why we sing. That's why we sing as Christians because in Jesus, in His death and resurrection, God up there has done real things down here in our world, in our history that change our lives, not just now, but in eternity.

And that's why we sing. For the same reason as the Israelites sang on that far bank of the Red Sea because they've realized God up there has not just stayed up there.

[12 : 20] He's done something in my world. And that is worth singing about. And by the way, that is what makes biblical faith different to all other faiths in the world because it's based on actual historical events.

No other faith is based on actual historical events like biblical faith is. If you want to know what's different between Christianity and all other faiths in the world, it's this. You know, other religions and other religious texts, and I've dipped into a few, are full of ideas about God.

Words of wise sages, very poetically and well written, but actually boring. I just find them boring. I'm sorry for other religions, but it's really boring reading just these ideas that these people sitting in caves have about God, especially compared to when I open God's inspired word, the Bible, and it is unique.

Amongst all the religious texts out there, this is unique in revealing the actual things God has done in our world. The actual events, the actual actions of an active God in our world.

And that is our song. not what we feel about God, not what we think, not our opinions.

[13 : 44] Our song is what God has actually done. And not just our song that we sing to each other on Sunday mornings, but that is the song that we sing to the world as Christians.

The song of what God has done. I don't want to go out there when I'm wanting to share the gospel with other people who aren't Christians.

I don't want to go out there and talk about theological ideas. That's boring. But I want to tell people what God has done. I want to tell people what God has actually done in our world and that's why the gospel is called news, by the way.

Our gospel is good news. It's uniquely news because news is about things that have actually happened, right? I don't want to watch the news to find out about people's opinions or their feelings.

I want to watch the news to find out what has actually happened in my world. Am I right? I mean, sadly, today a lot of the news has become people's opinions, more than actual events. But the news that I want to watch is news of things that has happened and that is the news we are to tell the world, not our opinions, but what has actually happened in our world and that is why we sing because God has actually done things.

[15 : 01] I hope this settles in your heart. I hope you realize this is the primary, main difference between the Bible and all other religious texts. This is a record of things that God has actually done from the beginning to the end and that is why we sing.

That's the first reason that we see in this song why God's people sing. But there's another reason. Not just what God has done, but as we move to the second part of the song, what God is doing presently.

What God is doing. Because you see, God's acts in the world when He decided to intervene in the history of our world in these ways and right from the beginning, they're not just random.

They're not just random events. They're part of the bigger story and we see this as we work through the biblical story. That everything God does is intentional and it's part of the bigger story.

And we actually see that hinted at even in this song. So look from verse 8 to 10. I want you to, I'm going to read this. Again, they're describing in another way what God has done, what God has just done in the Red Sea event.

[16 : 16] But I want you to notice the language that they use. From verse 8. The water heaped up at the blast from your nostrils. The current stood firm like a dam.

The watery depths congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. My desire will be gratified at their expense. I will draw my sword, my hand will destroy them.

But you blew with your breath and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Now, you might think in our uber sensitive culture that God's actions against the Egyptians are a little excessive.

aggressive. But I want you to remember back to the beginning of Exodus. And we saw right in chapter 1 that the resistance and the hostility of Pharaoh and the Egyptians towards the Israelites was not just political.

It was part of a deeper and demonic opposition to God's project for the world which he was carrying out at that time through the Israelites.

[17 : 33] And God's project for the world, we need to go even further back to Genesis and we write back to creation and what God made this world for and then what he told Abraham after the fall.

And God's project for the world is actually to restore order and blessing to this world of chaos and sin to undo the curse and to bring blessing and order like it was in creation back into this world.

And the rescue of the Israelites was a continuation of that grand project that God is doing. It's a continuation of his plan.

And that is why as we read these verses did you notice we're reminded of Genesis 1, the creation account because the language that's used here is the language of creation.

Look at verse 8 again. The end of verse 8, the watery depths congealed in the heart of the sea. Verse 10, but you blew with your breath, literally that's with your spirit, over the waters.

[18 : 40] Now this is creation language. They use this language to remind us of when God's spirit in Genesis 1 hovered over the chaotic depths.

Same words are used in the Hebrew as here in Genesis, as here in the song. When God's spirit hovered over the chaotic waters but then how God intervened and controlled that chaos and gathered up the waters to bring dry ground.

That's how creation is described. God starting the project of bringing order out of the chaos and he's doing that again. That's what the second part of the song tells us. He's doing what he did in creation again in rescuing the Israelites.

Rescuing the Israelites is a continuation of his plan to bring his order and blessing back into the world which is still in process while the judgment of the Egyptians is a defeat of the forces of chaos that threatens God's plan.

That's what the second part of the song tells us. It puts this event that's happened in history into the context of God's bigger grand plan for creation. So what this song reminds us and what Israel are singing about is God's plan for the world to bring order and blessing out of chaos and they know God is continuing that plan.

[20 : 08] He hasn't given up on that. That is his project and he's going to fulfill it and no matter how powerful chaos seems because it does seem powerful here to the Israelites it seemed overwhelming the forces that were against them to Christians to God's people in every age the forces that that rally against God's project in the world seem overwhelming.

They always seem every generation like they're going to win and yet I mean look at verse 9 this is what it was like to the Israelites the enemy said I will pursue I will overtake I will divide the spoil this is the Egyptians talking my desire will be gratified at their expense they're recounting when they were there on the on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea and they saw this army heading toward them intent on killing them imagine how scared they were and they're recounting that feeling and the arrogance of the Egyptians coming to kill them I will draw my sword my hand will destroy them and yet irrespective of the power of the chaos that was coming against the people of God look what happens in the next verse but you blew with your breath and the sea covered them they sank like lead in the mighty waters no matter how powerful the chaos against God's project seems

God always in the end defeats it and that is the song of the Israelites that is what they were to sing that is what they were to teach their children to sing because as they were going forward in God's project and they were going to be faced by lots of enemies they needed to remember God always defeats the chaos that threatens his world and his project in the end and that is our song today as well all who are saved by Christ which means if you are saved by Christ it means you now are also caught up in God's project for the world just like the Israelites were then you are caught up in his plan today and we look around and we see a world that is so against God's principles and God's plans and what God wants for his world but even in a world that is so against God and so set on embracing chaos because isn't it the world doesn't people love embracing disorder things how they're not created to be have you noticed how people lust after that people are so intent on embracing chaos and yet when we sing when we remind ourselves of these truths we remember

God's spirit God's breath is slitwork to control the chaos God's plan is still going forward and nobody no matter how strong they look can stop that and that is why we sing we sing because of what God has done in history we also sing because of what we know God is still doing today but there's a final reason we see in this song that we are to sing and that is because of what God still will do what God will do notice in your Bibles in Exodus 15 the last part of the song now changes to the future tense did you notice that when we were reading it verse 13 up until that point it had been the past tense what God has done what God has done what God has done but now verse 13 it changes to the future tense with your faithful love you will lead the people you have redeemed and you will guide them to your holy dwelling with your strength and it goes on the rest of the song is in the future tense why well because

God's acts in the past always tell his people something about the future that's the thing about God when God acts in the world they they don't only tell God's people about what he is doing but they therefore tell them about what the future holds and in Israel's case because God rescued them from the Egyptians for a purpose which was to bring them to the promised land Canaan and they knew that because he had communicated that to Abraham to the forefathers they knew God's rescue for them was for this purpose to bring them to the promised land therefore they can know that he will with the same power that he rescued them he will finish the job you see that in verse 17 first a bit of verse 17 in the song you will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your possession you will you will do this and nobody will be able to stop it they know just as the

[25 : 02] Egyptians couldn't stop them from escaping nobody will be able to stop them from getting to the promised land look at verse 15 the chiefs of Edom will be terrified these are all the kingdoms on the way to the promised land right trembling will seize the leaders of Moab all the inhabitants of Canaan will panic terror and dread will fall on them they will be as still as a stone because of your powerful arm until your people pass by Lord until the people you have purchased pass by well Christians those people whom God has purchased today because if you're a Christian that's what you are you are purchased by the blood of Christ Christians can sing the same song they can know about their future because they know that they have been saved for a reason see

Jesus coming to die for sins and to rise again was part of God's bigger plan the ultimate plan that verse 17 really points to look at verse 17 again it's interesting this verse because the Israelites are singing about something that's going to happen in their world in their experience but actually in the providence of God they're singing about something much bigger and more epic than that without even knowing it verse 17 you will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your possession Lord you have prepared the place for your dwelling Lord your hands have established the sanctuary this is not just talking about what Israel are going to do when they get to Canaan again it's using creation language and it's talking about the restoration of Eden the ultimate restoration of the place where

God and humans dwell together in peace and harmony where God will once again dwell with humans who will once again live under his blessing and provision without limit that is the place whether you know it or not that is the place you yearn for as a created being to be in right relationship with your creator but to dwell with him in a restored world under his blessing where he provides for you and you don't have to scrap around trying to provide for yourself and you get to enjoy him and his gifts without limit and that is what you were made for that is what God's end game is throughout the Bible and we can know if we are his people that is our future that is our future and that is why we sing because we know what's coming that is why we sing no matter how sick we might be no matter how the brokenness of this world might be affecting us we can sing through it because we know what is coming it's not just wishful thinking we know based on that's why we sing so

I'm going to turn to the New Testament to 1 Peter Peter is writing to a group of Christians who are under a lot of stress and trial their lives are not going very well but I want you to see how he starts his letter by reminding them of what they can know about the future 1 Peter chapter 1 from verse 3 have a look in your Bibles 1 Peter 1 from verse 3 blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead you see he bases it on real things that have happened it's not just wishful thinking and therefore verse 4 into an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you you see because of what

God did in history we can know for sure what he will do in the future and we can sing about it even though look down to verse 6 what Peter says you rejoice in this you rejoice in this even though now for a short time if necessary you suffer grief in various trials see what he's saying to these Christians even in the face of present difficulties because we know where we're going we can still rejoice and we can still sing and that is why again if you remember back to the reading from Revelation 15 John's vision he sees God's people singing but even before the restoration because in Revelation 15 God's wrath and judgment is still coming to the world but

[30 : 32] God's people are singing already even though there's chaos around them read Revelation 15 and 16 and you'll see there's crazy stuff happening around them and you get this picture in Revelation of these curses coming down these plagues people dying wars around and you see God's people in the middle just singing through it all it's amazing see because of the gospel of the gospel we can sing even now while the world's burning around us and you know what that's why the Bible commands Christians to sing did you know that the Bible doesn't suggest that you sing it commands that you do I'm going to read from Ephesians and Colossians you can see the verses on the screen behind me Ephesians 5 from verse 18 be filled with the spirit speaking to one another in psalms hymns and spiritual songs singing and making music with your heart to the

Lord and Colossians 3 15 to 16 and let the peace of Christ to which you were also called in one body rule your hearts and be thankful in verse 16 let the word of Christ dwell richly among you in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another how are we supposed to teach and admonish each other read the Bible together yes have Bible studies yes that's very good but in this case through psalms hymns and spiritual songs singing to God with gratitude in your heart singing must be part of the life of God's people it always has and it must continue to be because of all people in the world we have something to sing about and so we sing we sing at church to remind each other of these truths when we have forgotten them because we can so easily forget and not just to tell each other of the truths but to connect our emotions to feel our salvation again but we sing at home when you're making supper put on

Christian music good Christian music to remind yourselves of these truths every day learn Christian songs sing them in the car sing along to good Christian music and I say good Christian music because not all Christian music is good okay not all Christian music is helpful just because it's singing about biblical themes the songs we're to sing in our lives throughout our lives the songs we need to sing are not flowery songs about my feelings but songs that declare the works of God in the world the songs we are to sing we are to sing those songs in our daily lives so in the midst of all the chaos we can still feel our salvation and get excited about it and we're to sing because we won't stop singing

I want to close by reading from Isaiah 51 you can turn there in your Bible Isaiah 51 which is leading up to Isaiah his great prophecy in Isaiah chapter 53 about the atonement of Christ the servant who will come and save his people he has a glimpse this prophet of the world to come what's going to happen because of what Jesus will do and it's just a glimpse of the restored world but it is beautiful it is referred to as Zion here which is the capital of the restored world Jerusalem and he tells us about some of the stuff that's going to happen and he describes the restoration of creation that's still going to happen in Isaiah 51 verse 3 and I want you to notice what God's people are doing Isaiah is Isaiah 51 verse 3 for the Lord will comfort Zion he will comfort all her waste places and he will make her wilderness like

Eden and her desert like the garden of the Lord joy and gladness will be found in her thanksgiving and melodious song the future is full of music whatever happy songs we sing here nothing compares to what we will be singing when the world is fixed and we can know that's coming because just as God intervened to save his people in Exodus and plant them in their promised land he will do it again and plant us in ours look ahead to verse 9 from Isaiah 51 that's again what the prophet Isaiah sees he says wake up wake up arm of the Lord clothe yourself with strength wake up as in days past as in generations long ago wasn't it you who hacked

[36 : 00] Rahab to pieces that's the nickname for Egypt who pierced the sea monster wasn't it you who dried up the sea the waters of the great deep who made the sea bed into a road for the redeemed people to pass over and the redeemed of the Lord will return and so come to Zion with singing crowned with unending joy that is what God will do Isaiah is prophesying about God's people coming into his restored creation because of what Christ has done and they come there with singing and so what are we to do knowing that that's coming what are we to do in our lives now in this world of sin and death knowing where we're going based on what God has already done well look to the next chapter in Isaiah 52 verse 1 it addresses God's people and it says this wake up wake up put on your strength

Zion I don't know a better way to wake up and get excited about my salvation than singing singing about it and so I think we should do that now I think we should stand and we should sing about what God has done and what that means for our future