

Some Assembly Required / “Why We Sing”

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Do you have a favorite song?

You probably do. You know all the words. Every vocal inflection. Every nuance. You can anticipate every sound. The sound of fingers moving against strings as the notes change. The driving foundation of the bass, the soaring intensity of an organ, the intimacy of a solo piano. It's burned in your mind.

You've been inspired by the vulnerability or maybe the confidence in the vocal performance. The poetry of the lyric captivated your imagination and a melody has now become timeless to you because you have heard it a thousand times, you've sung it in the shower, and you've blasted it to keep yourself awake while you drive.

Do you have a favorite song?

I have a follow up question: Is your favorite song really even that good?

Could you sing it forever? Do you imagine that one day, you might grow tired of it?

This morning we are continuing our “Some Assembly Required” series where we look at the things that we do at church when we gather together. Today we're looking at the question “Why do we sing?”. We worship God in all sorts of ways, why is singing one of them?

Put simply it's because the Gospel of Jesus has given us something worth singing about for all eternity. We've been given a redemption song we can sing forever to the praise of his glorious grace. Thinking deeply and rightly about the Gospel, the salvation of our souls from sin and death through the shed blood of our Savior Jesus, stirs our affections to action and produces songs of adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition, instruction and blessing.

When we sing together as a church, for a moment our internal emotional and spiritual life is made manifest and our whole congregation is united around a singular act: proclaiming beautiful words, in a beautiful way, because we have seen the beauty of our Savior.

As we consider why we sing and live worshipful lives today, we're going to see three things:

Why do we sing?

- 1) To Savor and Enjoy the Gospel Together
- 2) To Encourage One Another and Help One Another Grow in Faith Through the Gospel
- 3) To Demonstrate the Power of the Gospel to Each Other and to the Watching World

Once more, here is our primary text for today,

Colossians 3:16-17

*16 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.*

*17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

A couple of weeks ago I had the chance to go to a restaurant in town for the first time. It's called 1889. It's in a cool old historic building downtown. It has dim lighting and high prices and steak. Really good steak. Or so I had heard. My parents got Jessica and I a gift certificate and offered to watch our kids and they gave us a much needed date night and so we went.

I order my steak and it is perfect. Grass fed beef from a local rancher. It's perfectly marbled with the right amount of fat so it won't dry out. It's perfectly cooked. It was beautiful. All by itself.

But those who prepared the meal for me didn't just serve me a perfect steak. They seasoned it perfectly with salt, pepper, and red wine demi glace.

The steak was perfect, but the experience I had with it was elevated by the seasoning. The steak was perfect - the salt brought out helped me to savor it. This helps illustrate our first point for today as we think about why we sing.

We sing

1) To Savor and Enjoy the Gospel Together

Savor is an interesting word but I think it makes the point. When we worship and sing together, we savor the gospel like we're at a family meal. We roll truth and beauty around in our mouths and feel it on our tongues. We explore with our senses its goodness. Psalm 34:8 invites us to taste and see that that Lord is good. Singing the story of the Gospel gives us the opportunity to do just that.

Now In the first part of our text today we're given the passive sounding command "Let".

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,

With such small text today, every word matters. And so I want to take a minute to help us think deeply and richly about what we're being asked to do. I want to savor "Let". I promise let is not as passive as you might think.

If we look back to the beginning of Bible in Genesis chapter 1 we see that the first command that God gives in all of creation is "Let".

Genesis 1:3

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

When the word "let" leaves the mouth of our God, Light and Space and Time, the universe all the heavenly bodies; our planet, the land the sea, and the creatures that inhabit both burst into existence. Humanity itself begins with a let. When in **Genesis 1:26**

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Back to our text, What do we want to have happen with all the power of let.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,

Let means to "Allow". Allow the word of Christ to dwell in you richly. Do everything you can to not get in the way of Christ's word dwelling in you richly, deeply, joyfully.

Let means "Make". Make the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Take action. Read the scriptures. Pray with vulnerability, often. Gather with God's people.

Let means "Cause". God with his Let caused the world and everything in it to exist for his glory. Now you, who are made in the image of God, cause the word of Christ to dwell in you richly. Cause this to happen through conscious remembering of the word of Christ every day.

This brings us to an important question.

What is the word of Christ?

Quite simply, it is the Gospel. The Good news that Jesus, by shedding his blood and dying in our place, has done everything required to save sinners and restore us to God. When we were hopeless and helpless, incapable of saving ourselves or pleasing God because of our sin, God in his mercy, sent Jesus to pay the penalty for our sin and more than that he's has deposited in every believer his righteousness. Now ,as believers gathered before God, it is not only as if we had never sinned but it is as if we had perfectly obeyed and this eternal inheritance of everlasting life in God's Kingdom that is ours in Christ is sealed by the Holy Spirit of God when we respond to the Gospel of Jesus through faith and believing.

The current english word worship finds its root is an earlier english word: "worthship"

We sing our praises God when we gather together because he is worthy of it. We ascribe worth when we worship. The Gospel is beautiful. And it is worth savoring and enjoying together. Just as the seasoning helped me to savor the steak I had and it brought our what was good about it so I could experience what was already there in a richer way, the songs we sing help us to savor the gospel and cause the word of Christ to dwell in us richly.

The Gospel is beautiful all by itself, and the songs we sing help us to see its beauty.

We savor and enjoy the Gospel in two ways

We do this by

1. Adorning the Gospel with Beautiful Melodies

2. Joyfully participating in response to God's Grace

Let's consider that first part, that we savor the Gospel by

1. Adorning the Gospel with Beautiful Melodies

Look again at the whole of verse 16

16 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.

By adorning the already beautiful Gospel with beautiful melodies we create the opportunity to let our hearts feel what our heads know. Words and phrases are stretched to fit a harmonic rhythm giving us time to think and meditate on the ideas and themes of scripture. Musical notes descend into the tomb where Jesus was buried or into the depths of our sin that we confess together and ascend with Christ as he rises from the dead raising us to new life with him.

Let's try this out with a song we sing here. "In Christ Alone." This is the third verse. These words are beautiful. I want to read it first, and then I want to sing it.

There in the ground, his body lay, light of the world by darkness slain. Then bursting forth in glorious day up from the grave he rose again. And as he stands in victory, sins curse has lost its grip on me. For I am his and he is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ

It's good. It could be better. For one, we could exponentially increase its impact by combining our forces. So let's sing this verse together. Think about the phrasing; what are the words that the song hangs on structurally? The movement of the melody; where it goes down, and where it rises.

In Christ Alone

*"There in the ground, his body lay, light of the world by darkness slain.
Then bursting forth in glorious day up from the grave he rose again.
And as he stands in victory, sins curse has lost its grip on me.
For I am his and he is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ"*

When we adorn the Gospel with beautiful melodies we make it easier to not only remember it's message, but to remember the effect of that message on our hearts. And we can take it with us wherever we go. We can sing the gospel to ourselves wherever we are and whenever the spirit reminds us of our need for it. Paul and Silas were imprisoned for sharing the good news of Jesus, they still had a song to sing. Whether we're at weddings or funerals, our songs keep the gospel near and clear.

Gospel songs belong in our homes too. We can sing to start our times in prayer. We can sing to our children to quiet and comfort their hearts with the truth of God's love to us. Songs and melodies help to keep the truth of God's word at the ready in our minds.

A couple years back someone in our church thanked me for introducing the song "Shine Into Our Night". She let me know that she had been singing it as lullaby to her baby. This is a song that I think of as a song of confession. It seemed to me, at first, to maybe be an odd choice for a lullaby. Upon further reflection I realized that this mom was discipling her child from infancy in the knowledge that Christ is our only refuge from sin. How beautiful is that? Do you know it well enough to sing it in your home?

Shine Into Our Night

*"We are not what we should be. We haven't sought what we should seek.
We've seen your glory Lord and looked away. Our hearts are bent our eyes are dim.
Our finest works are stained with sin and emptiness has shadowed all our ways.
Jesus Christ, shine into our night. Drive our dark away until your glory fills our eyes.
Jesus Christ, shine into our night and bind us to your cross where we find life."*

Adorning the Gospel with beautiful, singable melodies help us carry the truth of it in our hearts wherever we go. The story of the gospel is beautiful, and it is easier to comprehend that beauty when your lungs are literally resonating with the excellencies of him called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

Another way that we savor and enjoy the gospel together, causing us the word of Christ to dwell richly in us is by

2. Joyfully Participating in Response God's Grace

In studying for this sermon I realized that there are over 400 references of singing to the Lord in the Bible. There are 50 direct commands to sing. The largest book of the Bible is the Psalms which is a song book.

God himself sings

In **Zephaniah 3:17** the scriptures say

*17 The Lord your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.*

and again, Jesus sings and worships the Father after the Passover meal on the night he was betrayed. How amazing would that have been to be in the presence of? Jesus is a much better worship leader than I am.

God in his splendor, in his justice, in his loving-kindness, in his majesty, - simply by the nature of who he is - he is worthy of all adoration and praise and glory and honor forever. He's worthy of the elevated language of poetry, he is worthy of the fanfare of instruments to herald and proclaim his glory. He is worthy of our songs.

But for all the perfections that the Godhead possesses. the Gospel of Jesus is the crown jewel.

From **Colossians 1:15-20**

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

In another letter **Philippians 2:6-11**, we see how this preeminence of Jesus and work effects our worship of God.

6, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. We Worship the Son in the Spirit to the Glory of God the Father. Our worship of Jesus in the Spirit to the Glory of God the Father is what makes us Christian.

The good news of Jesus is really good. We haven't only been given the command to sing. In Jesus we've been given an amazing reason to sing. We haven't only been given the command to shout for joy. We've been given a reason to shout for joy. The songs that we sing are not merely truth delivery vehicles. They are meant to be beautiful. They are meant to stir our affections. Responding rightly to the Gospel requires having right affections for it and our songs help us express and experience right affections.

And God in his grace has given us a people to respond with. Of all the instruments that you see in this Church the most important one is the congregation. It is not the guitar or the piano. If the Church could be reduced to a sound, the sound of Church is congregational singing. One day we will worship with people from every tribe and tongue and nation, but today we worship with people from all over Missoula, Lolo, Florence, Stevensville, Arlee, Alberton, and even Superior. What a gift that we can all come together from so many different places and yet with one voice we worship Jesus for all that he has done for us.

God has redeemed for himself a people and when we sing together, and joyfully respond to the Gospel, we demonstrate that we are a part of the people that God has redeemed.

Today, if you're here and you have grown up thinking that singing in worship is not for you - I want you to know that you are missing out.

Our singing is part of our response to God's grace. Singing is part of your ministry to your fellow church members. And singing is for you! - That the word of Christ might dwell richly in your soul.

Those who sing, sing because of what Christ has done. We don't offer our praise to get something from God. We sing because of what we have already received.

I want to implore you: Join the church in singing.

You've been commanded to sing, you've been given a reason to sing, you're surrounded by people who have been given a reason to sing and those who gather around Jesus in his new kingdom will sing.

Don't wait for that day, sing now.

Psalms 146:1-2 says

1 Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! 2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

Don't just participate. Join the Psalmist. Sing full throated. Christ is worthy of our worship. You are freed to joyfully sing, because your joy is found in Christ. We're not singing in response to what the band is doing, we sing in response to what Jesus has done at the cross. God, who rejoices over you with singing, wants you to join in and join the choir.

This leads into our second point for today as we think about why we sing.
and that is

2) To Encourage and Help One Another Grow in Faith Through the Gospel

Colossians 3:16 encourages us to

*16 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.*

Can songs teach and admonish us and help us grow?

I used to be a counselor at a christian camp. My role was to work with the very young children of families who came up for the week. We'd sing all the time.

"Tik-tok. Hear the clock, it's clean up time, it's clean up time."

or

"This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands, wash our hands."

or what about

*"Be careful little mouths what you say. O be careful little mouths what you say.
For the Father up above is looking down below, O be careful little mouths what you say."*

Songs can absolutely teach us, help us, encourage us and warn us.

Here at Sovereign Hope we would say that our worship ministry is one of the primary teaching ministries of the Church. Maybe that surprises you. Have you ever thought about how much you have learned about God, not through preaching or bible study, but through the songs we sing? In order to respond rightly to God and what he's done - you need to know about him and what he's like.

The songbook of our Church is our Theology class. Our songs regularly are teaching us about God's power, his might and his glory. His attributes and his character. We sing about God's trustworthiness, and his goodness. His posture towards us and how we should respond to his grace. They have taught us about the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy spirit. They teach us that God is Holy and set apart. That we are sinners with a great need. That Jesus has solved our greatest problem and that we've been sent to share this good news of his grace to the ends of the earth. They teach us that our lives are a vapor, that God's kingdom is eternal and they invite to adore, behold, and worship Jesus in the Spirit, to the Glory of God the Father.

If you hang around here long enough, you will learn all of those things through songs we sing. Everyone is a Theologian. Your theology is just the sum of your thoughts about God. We want to help each other be good theologians. Biblical theologians. Sunday morning is the greatest discipleship group that we have and you're all in on it. When we gather today and sing to one another we are all students and we are all teachers.

The word “worship” in church-world gets tossed around a lot as a synonym for music or singing. And as we’ve talked about today we do worship God with our singing. Christ is indeed the object of Christian worship, but he is not the only audience.

When it comes to times of gathered worship I want to challenge the notion that we sing for “An Audience of One”. I heard that all the time when I was growing up and I saw how it shaped how the church worshipped. We turned the lights down low and turned the volume up loud and we did that, in essence, so that people could feel anonymous in the church. We wanted them to have what we called “a worship experience”. Since your worship is for an audience of one, we tried to help you forget that there were all these other people here.

The thinking was that if the lights were down low you would be more inclined to have a powerful and personal experience between you and God. You wouldn’t be self-conscious or concerned about other people looking at you. You could disappear in the background. And if the music was loud, then maybe you would feel more comfortable singing. After all, the music would be so loud that no one will be able to hear your voice. So it won’t matter if you’re not confident with your singing voice. Just go for it and we’ll drown you out.

The problem is, as someone who has been a part of leading worship services since 1997, the opposite happened. What we thought would lead to life-giving, and powerful times of worship actually discouraged participation. It increased isolation in the body and many in the church simply became spectators of a highly produced musical performance. They enjoyed worship, but they left it to the professionals.

The issue is that we do not sing to an audience of one.
We Sing to God and we sing to each other about him.

I have a couple of lines from three songs here that I want to share with you.

Look and See

*O Look and see our God and Celebrate the Power of the cross and the empty grave
and now we’re free, let the redeemed, lift up your heads
O look and see our God.*

Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery

*Come behold the wondrous mystery in the dawning of the king
He theme of heaven’s praises robed in frail humanity*

A Mighty Fortress is Our God

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing
Our helper, he, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing*

These are just three examples where the primary audience we are singing to is not God, but one another. Teaching one another in all wisdom, singing, with thankfulness in our hearts to God. So this is why we leave the lights on. This is why we designed this room with these sound panels, and why we have the volume set where we do. We want you to see one another. We want you to hear one another. Even as we eventually bring more instruments back into our worship service like the drum set, the congregation remains the primary instrument.

When we sing together we are reminded that Christ has redeemed a people. The young, the older, the married, the single, those who are wrestling with kids the whole service. We all encourage one another and help each other grow as we collectively testify to God’s glory in the Gospel.

We are connected to one another in Christ and hearing you sing helps me worship him.
Seeing you worship, helps me worship him.

Singing to God and about him is not the worship teams ministry to you.
It is our ministry to God and to each other.

Let's move on to our last point for today

Why do we sing?

3) To Demonstrate the Power of the Gospel to Each Other and to the Watching World

Our passage today, in context, is part of the Apostle Paul's letter to a church in Colossae.
We just spoke last week about the power of simply reading God's word together and so as we consider this last point, it's a good time to zoom out a little. I'm going to read **Colossians 3:1-17**

3 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 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. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

As we gather together over the years, our times of corporate worship have an effect. Little by little, inch by inch, we put off and we put on. As we see each other grow in joy and faithfulness, as know each others stories of success and failure, we thank God for one another. We thank God that we're still singing together - a little bit wiser and with a deeper faith that's been tested and proved.

In October I will be 39 years old. That means that in 2022 we are as far away from 1983 when I was born as 1983 is from 1948. Time moves fast. Faster than you might think

In light of that speed I often joke with my kids that I'd like them to stop growing up. In my own head, I'm still pretty close to the person was 14 years when I got married - but my oldest will be a teenager this year and my youngest just turned 5. I joke with them about wanting them to stop growing up. But it's joke. I love watching them grow up.

I love watching them mature and become Independent. I love watching them figure what they're great at, watching them grow in their gift and talents. I love watching them grow in their faith as they desire to read the bible, pray when things are difficult. I'm so grateful when they confess sins and ask for help. What is more encouraging than seeing someone grow in their faith?

Over the years here in a local church - we'll watch each other grow. We won't just watch each other grow, we'll help each other grow. The wealth of testimonies in this church of God's grace is staggering. Whether it's the things we've been through separately or the things we've been through together, God is using all of it. He making us his people. People who put off malice and anger and sexual immorality. People who put on kindness, humility patience and love.

People who can do that because of the song of thankfulness that God has put in our hearts. The fact that we are all in this room today is a miracle.

And yet here we all are. In this place in this time. Think about all the different experiences in this room. The way that people were raised, the baggage or trauma's or anxieties we all have. Some of us were saved in good churches, some of us... not gonna lie, things got weird. We've got blue collar workers, tech sector workers doctors, lawyers, teachers, students and everything in between. We have people from all walks of life and every socioeconomic background attending. While Montana itself is just not a very racially diverse state, I'm grateful for a church that supports missions efforts around the world and is ready to welcome people from every race and every nation.

What stands and unites such a varied cross section of people is the gospel we sing together each Sunday. Nothing unites like the gospel and God in his wisdom has brought so many different people to it, people who have nothing else in common, to testify to its power, truthfulness, and loveliness.

To sing side by side with one another helps us grow in our faith, but it is also a powerful testimony to the world. There is so much division in the world. The idea that anything could unite us seems like a far-off dream.

Yet in **Colossians 3:11** Paul writes:

11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

What can unite us all: Christ and his Gospel.

This Church has this gift and for those who comes in and experience the unity that we have in Christ, it is a winsome and attractive thing. I had said that the church doesn't sing to an audience of one. Instead we sing to God and to one another about him. There's actually a third audience: We sing to those who don't yet believe. As powerful as it is for Christians to sing redemption songs side by side across all the divisions that could exist, to the watching world it almost seems too good to be true.

If you're here today and you want to know more about how this Jesus we sing about has changed everything for the people in this room, I'd encourage to talk with one of the Pastors or the Elders. Talk to anyone that you've seen on the platform today. I'd even encourage to talk to anyone in our church. Christ has changed everything for all of us.

To the Church, while some will come from the outside into our midst to see this peculiar choir sing about the glory of God in the gospel, many will not.

As we close I want us to consider **Colossians 3:17**

17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

I said earlier that in church-world "worship" has become synonymous with music. It's just not true though. We've talked a lot today about how our songs help us experience and savor the beauty of the gospel, how they help us remember it and preach it to ourselves. How we've been commanded to sing and been given a reason to sing. How our singing unifies us, disciplines us and evangelizes to a world in need of hope.

But the songs that we sing are lived out in our words and our deeds. In our homes and our city.
Redeemed people bring redemption wherever they go.

May the songs we sing in here together be reflected in every word and deed. In every thought and sacrifice. May our spiritual act of worship be giving our lives back, all that we are, and all that we do, as living sacrifices to the one who laid down his life for us first so that might sing an eternal song of his glorious grace.