

Songs of Life

A GOSPEL SONG

What song are you singing? In this series we've looked at a number of songs. These Psalms are real songs written by real people in real situations very similar to the real situations people like you and I face. They are given to us as songs we can sing. What song are you singing?

Perhaps your song is one of making a choice. Psalm 1, the doorway to the Psalms offers an invitation to choose to follow God's way. Perhaps your song is the song of having to make a choice – one that will bring you closer to God, or one that will draw you away from him. Perhaps your song is a song of praise (Psalm 33). Even in the midst of all that life can throw at us, it is possible to sing a song of praise to God. Perhaps now, in all that is happening around you and in you, you are able to sing a song of praise.

Perhaps your song is the song of delight in God (Psalm 37). Perhaps you are awake to the powerful, sustaining presence of God, and you are able to know that presence in all the places you go – home, work, school, church, town.... Perhaps your song is one of waiting, and waiting patiently! (Psalm 40) Learning to trust God, our catcher, often involves waiting and maybe that's the song you are singing. Perhaps your song is a cry from the depth of your heart because right now life is tough. Your song is one of longing for the closeness and presence of God once again (Psalm 42-43). Perhaps your song comes from the midst of a crisis and you long to know God as your refuge. (Psalm 46) Perhaps your song is the song of repentance and although it is painful, you are experiencing the freedom from guilt that comes from hiding the truth (Psalm 51). Perhaps your song is learning not to fear but to trust in the Most High God who loves you because he loves you because he loves you...(Psalm 91).

What song are you singing? Perhaps your song is a different one from the one we've thought about, but life has a tune and we're singing one song or another so...what's your song?

Perhaps you are singing a new song!! One of the lovely things about hearing testimony is that you always hear about a new song. I gave my testimony not so long ago about a new song that I found myself singing, and I did the same last week. I gave testimony to a new song when Lisa's job changed quite suddenly and unexpectedly. You may remember that we found ourselves having to figure out how to respond to a God who had been generous beyond anything we had expected. Our new song was living in response to the generosity of God to us, and we are still learning to sing that song. As I prepared for last week's sermon, I found myself singing a new song. As I was writing words about the Most High God it hit me again that these words were for me just as much as for you, and that if the Most High God is my catcher and I live for him and make him my refuge, I do not need to fear for the future. And friends, whatever your song right now, whatever song you are singing, it is possible to sing a new song.

Psalm 96

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples.

For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; He is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.
Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns."
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.
Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it;
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them.
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes,
He comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.

Here it is friends – sing to the Lord a new song. At the SEBA celebration last week, Nigel Wright spoke from Romans 8, and he spoke about perspective. He was saying we can look at the world and get very depressed, because everything seems to move towards decay! But if we look at the world through a different perspective (and in this case it was the perspective of Romans 8) we see something entirely different. We see a world full of purpose, very far from leading to decay, but leading to and moving towards something far greater. We can look at the world around us, our lives and the things that are happening in them...we can look towards the future with fear and trembling...and we can, if we want to, see decay, hopelessness. But friends, if we look from a different perspective, if we look at the world and our lives from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, we see something entirely different! We see something worth singing about, because we see a gospel song – and a gospel song is good news!

Psalms 96 is a gospel song and it shouts at us: sing, sing, for heaven's sake sing. It encourages us to see from the perspective of the gospel – the good news of who God is, what he has done, what he is doing and what he will do. And friends, when we see from that perspective – we can sing a new song!!

My best guess would be that many of us need a new song. How do you get to sing a new song? Well perhaps it begins by looking back. A new song is rooted in what God has already done. The word proclaim in verse 2 is the Hebrew word 'basar' meaning 'to proclaim the news.' It is the root word for the term gospel. It appears that the idea of a new song comes from a military context – when the people celebrated a new situation brought about by God's warring activity – it was good news from the battlefield. It is a victory song. Friends we have a victory song:

- It is the song of God's excellent story of salvation;
- God's excellent creation given to us for us to enjoy;
- God's excellent dream of sharing with us what he already has;
- God's excellent work in history to keep that dream alive;

- his excellent choice of Israel to be a light to the Gentiles;
- his excellent rescue of his people from Egypt;
- his excellent provision everyday for 40 years as they wandered in the wilderness;
- his excellent gift of the law – here is the best way to live;
- his excellent promise of land fulfilled under Joshua;
- his excellent love for his people as they tested him again and again and again by
 - their rebelliousness;
 - his excellent patience as he longed for his people to walk in his way – the best
 - way possible;
- his excellent rescue from exile to bring the people back;
- his excellent gift of Jesus – the very best;

His death on the cross has brought you life. He has brought you from the Kingdom of darkness into his glorious kingdom of light. He has defeated death and its power over you. He has brought you forgiveness. He has lavished his grace upon us with wisdom and understanding. He has won us freedom from sin, freedom from guilt, freedom from fear, freedom from having to earn his love, freedom from having to prove yourself, freedom to live as the person he created you to live, and he's already done that! This is our victory song: victory over death; victory over sin; victory over darkness; victory over decay; victory over the power of evil. When we remember our salvation and proclaim his salvation... we begin to sing a new song. Because what he has done in the past is made vitally present here and now!

Friends, when we remember what God has done, we begin again to see from a different perspective. The good news, the gospel, is able to break into the present as we recall his salvation. We also begin to sing a new song when we are awake to God in the present – right here and right now! “Say among the nation – The Lord reigns.” (v10) You notice the Psalm talks a lot about the nations. This ‘gospel’ isn’t just for us – it is for all people, in all places, in all times.

Declare to everyone, everywhere that God reigns! And that he reigns now! Today! Here! Everywhere! God is with us now - he is as powerfully present as he ever was and we don’t need to run anywhere to find him. Friends, it is so easy for us to be distracted by things that will pull us away from the truth that the Lord reigns. Nations do it because they serve false gods. They seek power and wealth and they serve the gods of this age. But the gods of the nations are idols (v5). And it is easy for us too, to worship idols to be seduced by the wisdom of the age – the gods of power and wealth and self interest. But when we are awake to the powerful, sustaining presence of God we re-orientate ourselves and we are able to meet God again! We are able to bring ourselves again before his glorious presence just as we are.

Friends, when we come together, in his sanctuary we come to proclaim that the Lord reigns! We come to bring ourselves – our burdens, our shame, our guilt, our worn-downness from the pressures of the past week, our failures and our pain, and we offer ourselves to him, and we begin to sing a new song:

- we bring our shame and guilt and he gives us grace and healing
- we bring our brokenness and he gives us wholeness
- we come in weakness and we are made perfect in his strength
- we bring our limited perspective and he opens our eyes to the truth of his reign here and now.
- We come in rags and we are dazzled by his beauty.

We are reminded too that the world has purpose.

Verses 10-12:

Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.” The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;

He will judge the peoples with equity.

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it;

Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them.

Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy;

The world is reliable, the earth stable, the human home dependable – because the Lord reigns! If the world has no story to live by – then all is lost – there is no meaning. But God created it, he holds it in his hand, and he is working out his purpose and its not all leading to decay and right now. Jesus sustains the world by his powerful word. We are to sing a new song because the Lord is coming.

The Psalm is often used in the traditional liturgy of the church on either Christmas Eve or Christmas Day when the church remembers the coming of Christ to his people. But advent, coming, is twofold – he is coming again! This is ultimately the good news – the gospel. The truth of the gospel is that it looks both backwards – to all that God has done, and forward – to all that he is about to do and beginning to do and planning to do to shape the future. As we sing a new song we celebrate God's future - we trust that God has the power to bring about all that he has promised. As we celebrate God's future we are stirred to new visions. That's exactly what we've been doing as a church over the last few months – and the deacons have only this week been discerning a new vision statement. Here's what we think it is going to be:

By 2015 we will be naturally radical followers of Christ

Caught up in Him...

Enjoying each other...

Transforming communities...

And then some...

Friends, we live between the dreaming and the coming true, and as we look forward into God's future we can allow God himself to inhabit the gap between promise and fulfilment. We bring our broken dreams and lay them before him; we bring our new dreams and ask for his mighty power and presence as we walk toward them. Because we do this, we do not look to the future and lose heart.

To sing a new song is to sing with hope because we are assured of God's powerful action. We can live with patience and fortitude for ourselves and for others as we wait for fulfilment, justice, peace. Perhaps the biggest challenge of being able to sing a new song is that it is to sing a song that is counter-cultural. It requires us to sing from a different perspective from many around us. But if we sing this gospel song we will encounter the newness, the nowness, and the nearness of the Most High God, the one who reigns.

Friends, sing, sing, sing. For heaven's sake sing!

Amen

Preached at Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 6th December by Rev. Ian Phillips.