

Sing and Listen

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[0:01] This song is a good segue to Psalm 81. It's about singing praise to God and Psalm 81 tells us to praise Him. And I'll read it out loud first for us. Sing aloud to God our strength. Shop for joy to the God of Jacob.

Raise a song. Sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp. Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon on our feast day. For it is a statute for Israel, a rule of the God of Jacob.

He made it a decree in Joseph when he went out over the land of Egypt. I hear a language I had not known. I relieved your shoulder of burden. Your hands were freed from the basket.

In distress you called, and I delivered you. I answered you in the secret place of thunder. I tested you at the waters of Meribah, Selah. Hear, O my people, while I admonish you.

O Israel, if you would but, listen to me. There shall be no strange God among you. You shall not bow down to a foreign God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

[1:10] Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people did not listen to my voice. Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own counsels.

O that my people would listen to me. That Israel would walk in my ways. I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes. Those who hate the Lord would cringe toward him, and their fate would last forever.

But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat. And with honey from the rock, I would satisfy you. You guys have all heard the advice.

You've probably read Steve Jobs' biography. One of the advice he'd like to give people was, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. You somehow know what you truly want to become.

That might be good advice when it comes to career choices. But when it comes to, obviously, our ethical and spiritual choices, it's not a good idea to follow our heart.

[2:10] And this passage tells us why. It says that our hearts are sinful and stubborn. And it's a sign of God's judgment when we are given over to the ways of our hearts and to follow our own counsels.

And because of that, in our own sinfulness, in the sinfulness of our hearts, our tendency is to seek fulfillment and satisfaction in things other than God. But Psalm 81 here teaches us that we should listen to the Lord, obey him, and listen to the Lord who alone can satisfy us.

So in verses 1 to 7, we find the invitation to sing to God. And then in verses 8 to 16, we find an admonition to listen to God. And first is a command to sing, invitation to sing.

And we see in verses 1 to 3, four different commands that all deal with some kind of musical expression of worship. So first it's sing aloud, then shout for joy, then raise a song, and then sound the tambourine, and then blow the trumpet.

They're all commands that deal with some kind of musical expression. And the occasion seems to be, as indicated by verse 3, a feast day of the new moon. So according to, you know, this will come up later, but according to Numbers 10.10, God had appointed a feast for every month, the beginning of the month at the new moon, to celebrate and thank God for the new month.

[3 : 29] And it's easy to kind of gloss over these things because you see it's so frequent in the psalm. But it's important to pause and note the significance of singing in Christian community, right?

Because the Bible contains over 400 general references to singing and almost 50 direct commands to sing in Scripture, including in this psalm. And obviously the whole book of psalms actually is music, right?

It's the longest book in the Bible, but it's a collection of songs complete with musical notations, right? So if you look at the superscription of the psalm, it says to the choir master, right?

According to the gitith. The gitith is probably a reference to some kind of instrument made by people of Gath. And so there's an instrumental notation, musical notation.

It references choir. And then later it says selah, which is also kind of a musical pause, right? So it's like it's God, music is so important that God put music into Scripture.

[4 : 31] And that's, I think, I think that's why every Christian, you know, really should sing and would be commanded to sing.

But it's even a non-singer, when he or she becomes a Christian, becomes a singer, right? That's the, that's, we are called to worship him through song. And I think, and he gives reasons for that.

He doesn't just stop there and tells us to sing. He gives us reasons why we should sing. And first reason is given in verses four to five. It says, for it is a statute for Israel, a rule of the God of Jacob.

He made it a decree in Joseph when he went out over the land of Egypt, right? So this was the first reason that it's a command, right? That God commanded us to sing. And he is our king. He is our God.

And it is right for us to obey him and sing to him in praise. But that's not the only reason. And another reason that is given for singing is in verses five to seven. It begins by saying, I hear a language I had not known.

[5 : 28] So that's probably a reference to a prophetic kind of oracle that this, this psalmist is receiving from the Lord. And then he basically starts to quote the oracle, which is from God, God speaking.

And, and, and he's saying that he heard it in it. Maybe he heard it in a language he had not previously known, especially in a foreign tongue, or he could be meaning that he, it was hard for him to understand, or it's like he didn't understand the fullness of it, or it's, but the oracle goes like this.

It says, I relieved your shoulder of the burden. Your hands were freed from the basket. In distress, you called and I delivered you. I answered you in the secret place of thunder.

I tested you at the waters of Meribah, Selah. So the reason given here for why we should sing and worship is because he's our deliverer, right? Because he relieved us from the heavy burden of slavery in Egypt, because God delivered us out of Egypt, of the Israelites.

And he revealed himself to us in mighty thunder on Mount Sinai. And he even tested us in order to sanctify us and to prove us true at the waters of Meribah, right? And it's this great salvation that we have from God that impels us to sing.

- [6 : 36] And even, and that's why, even in a Christian, that's not a good singer is nonetheless a genuine singer. We all sing from our hearts because of what God has done.
- So that's the first half of the song is an invitation to sing to God. And then the psalmist transitions in verse eight to an admonition to listen to God, because in this exhortation to sing to God, the psalmist realizes that God's people have been unfaithful repeatedly.
- And, and so he says, hear, oh, my people, this is God speaking, while I admonish you, oh, Israel, if you would but listen to me. This is, actually ties really well into our Sunday sermons coming up, but the word hear and listen are the same Hebrew words.
- And in the same way in the English, when you tell someone to listen, you could mean to just listen to you, auditory sense, but also you could mean listen, meaning obey, right? So the Hebrew also has two nuances, both of those.
- And, and, and that's God's using it in both senses. They, he wants them to hear him. He also wants them to obey him, listen to him. But instead, God's people had turned a deaf ear to him, have had turned to idols.
- [7 : 42] And so God says in verses nine to 10, there shall be no strange God among you. You shall not bow down to a foreign God. I am the Lord, your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.
- These two verses are really a summary of, uh, the prologue and the first two commandments of the 10 commandments. So in Exodus 20, uh, two to five and Deuteronomy five, six to nine, because there God introduced himself in exactly the same way.
- He says, I am the Lord, your God who brought you up out of land of Egypt. Uh, and, uh, and then he gives the 10 commandments and first two of which is, you shall have no other gods besides me. And then second is, you shall not make gifts and image in the form of anything.
- And you shall not bow down to them or worship them. Right? So those two commands are really distilled in verses nine to 10. There shall be no strange God among you. You shall not bow down to foreign God. And then the introduction, I am the Lord, your God who brought you up out of land of Egypt.
- And that verse 10 is really emphatic because, uh, if you look back, you scan back to kind of verse six, where the Oracle began, it's actually not clear who's speaking.
- [8 : 47] Right? Cause the Psalmist says, Oh, like I got this, I didn't, I got this, you know, Oracle in a language I did not understand. And he starts giving the Oracle, but it's not clear who the speaker is. The speaker is not introduced until verse 10.
- So it's really emphatic when in verse 10, God says, I am the Lord, your God, right? Who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And in fact, the Hebrew pronoun I is in, it's an emphatic form.
- So it means like I myself, I myself am the Lord, your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And so this is, you can kind of feel God's passion here because he's saying, I'm the one that brought you out of your slavery.
- I'm the one that had a relationship with you. I'm the one that knows you. I'm your savior. And instead, Israel's turned to a strange God, God that they never knew. Uh, they've turned to a foreign God.
- That's not theirs, uh, to another person's God, to another nation's God. But in spite of that, God still approaches them, comes to them and tells them, open your mouth wide and I will fill it.
- [9 : 49] It's a great image, right? It's like a, um, I don't know. It's almost, you could picture them in the wilderness, right? Just like keeping their mouths agape and then waiting for the manna to fall or like, I don't know, it's just like a, uh, the quail to come down.

It just, uh, and cause it's so easy to think of God as someone who is stingy, right? Or sparing with us or someone, this strict, you know, parental figure that wants to withhold all the good and fun things from us, right?

Or like, it's like, that's how we can think of it. So we could feel like we have to have all our way or finagle something to get what we want from him. But that's not, you know, the truth. The truth is God says, open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

Right? It's how simple is that? We don't need to beg or, you know, bargain with him, barter with him. We simply believe and open our mouths and God's not a Scrooge, right?

He says, open it wide. Expect God to fill it. And then he will fill it generously. And, and, and so God who delivered Israel out of their slavery has been exceedingly generous with them.

[10 : 51] Yet, in spite of all this, it says in verse 11, but my people did not listen to my voice. Israel would not submit to me. Um, so God laments, uh, this disobedience.

And then he promises his people in verses 13 to 16. Oh, that my people would listen to me, uh, that Israel would walk in my ways. I will soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes.

Those who hate the Lord would cringe toward him and their fate would last forever. But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat and with honey from the rock. I would satisfy you. Um, so you probably hear the repetition of the command right here.

Listen, listen, uh, repeat four times, uh, in the second half of the Psalm. Uh, and this is a great promise in verses 13 to 16. And notice how the person, the pronoun, personal pronoun changes from the first person to the third person and then back to the first person in verses 15 to 16.

It could be a little confusing when you're just reading it. Like who in the world is talking, right? And then, uh, because it's still God talking the whole time and God's referring to himself as a third person. Uh, uh, uh, uh, and, uh, and that's called, it's a literary device called eleism.

[12 : 05] Uh, basically it's, uh, what you do when you refer to yourself in the third person, you create a sense of distance and a sense of dignity, uh, and grandeur.

So you're conveying the fact that, no, I'm not someone that you can just approach lightly. Uh, I'm this grand figure, right? That, that's, that has some distance from you, right? That's kind of, that's what the literary device does.

And so it's, for example, Shakespeare uses it, uh, in some of his writings, uh, and he puts it in characters, makes characters referred to themselves as the third person. Um, Julius Caesar, in his writing in the Gallic Wars, he writes like that in the third person.

He's obviously, he has too big of a head, right? He's writing of himself in that way. Um, and so God's saying, God, I'm a great God and you can't approach me on your own terms whenever you want.

No, you have to approach him on his terms. And, and, and notice that the third person, he shifts the third person when God's talking about the enemies of his people. So he distances himself from them.

[13 : 04] Uh, they say, he says, those who hate the Lord would cringe toward him and their fate would last forever. So God's not approachable to these enemies of God's people. Uh, but he, the same great God would feed you with the finest of the wheat.

And once the, the object that switch shifts back to God's people, he reverts to the first person. He says, with honey from the rock, I would satisfy you, right?

So when addressing his own people, God, once again, uses the intimate relational first person pronoun. No, these people, they don't know me. I'm a hymn to them. I'm the great God that they cannot approach.

But yet to you, uh, I am this God. I would satisfy you personally. Uh, and so this, we see again, going back to that, uh, um, invitation early in verse 10, open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

And similarly here, God promises to feed them with the finest of the wheat and with honey from the rock. Uh, this is an allusion to Deuteronomy 32, 13, 14, where Moses recounts all the great things that God did after delivering them out of Egypt.

[14:07] And he specifically says that God, uh, you know, made them suckle, uh, with honey out of the rock and he fed them with the very finest of the wheat. So, um, I was doing some research and looking, it turns out that bees actually have been documented to, you know, make honeycombs between rocky crags.

And, uh, you, I found some pictures of it was really cool looking. And, uh, and, and so it's basically raw, wild honey. It's like the best thing you can find. You know, in the ancient world, we eat and the finest wheat. So God's saying, I will give you the best of fares.

I would richly satisfy you. And, and, and, but they still stubbornly refuse to listen. Right. And, and how often is this the case with us? Right. It's, if only we would turn to him, he would richly satisfy us, but we instead turn to the fleeting pleasures of this world.

Right. If only we turn to him, we have, you open our mouth toward him, he will fill us. Instead, we turn to the esteem and approval of men and women. And instead we turn to the riches of this world.

And then we leave dissatisfied with the bad taste in our mouths. Right. Uh, but God offers us the finest of the wheat and honey from the rock. Uh, and he promised to satisfy us.

[15:17] And so Israel was then foolish to turn away from the God who had delivered them from their slavery in Egypt. And, and as Christians, right, uh, we, uh, we'd be foolish then to turn away from the God who delivered us also from the slavery, our slavery to sin.

Cause as first Corinthians 10, Paul compares Israel's exodus to the salvation that we have as Christians. Right. And the, the exodus from Egypt ultimately points to and foreshadows our exodus from our slavery to sin.

Right. Uh, and that's what Christ accomplished for us by dying on the cross as the ransom price for our freedom. And so then as we, whenever we are tempted to doubt God's good province in our lives, right, whenever we are tempted to ever to think that God's withholding something good from us, right, uh, like these Israelites doing.

And then as whenever we're tempted to turn to other things for satisfaction and fulfillment, then we have to remember the cross and remember the exodus from us. So that that's what God did to free us and then listen to the Lord who alone can satisfy us.

And that's why God says, God saying to us, I am, I am not anyone else. I am the Lord, your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth.

[16:28] Why? And I will fill it. Let's take that as an invitation to us and approach God in prayer and ask him to fill us and open up our mouths of faith.

Let's take that as an invitation to us and pray for us.