

We Win the World with Singing

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the profound impact of Godward singing in expressing the glory and worth of God, highlighting how singing sends lovers of Christ to the nations, sustains servants of Christ, sets captives free, reveals the all-satisfying glory of Christ, and signifies the triumph of Christ among the nations. The speaker draws connections between the joy of singing and the fulfillment of the Great Commission, urging listeners to embrace the joy of Godward singing as a powerful tool for spreading the gospel globally.

Scripture: Psalms 96:2, Mark 14:26, Acts 16:25, Psalms 138:4, Isaiah 34:16, Isaiah 35:10, Matthew 28:19, Psalms 67:4, Revelation 5:9

Topics: "Godward Singing", "Great Commission"

Description

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Transcript

I'd like to begin by giving two answers to the question, why does this conference exist? Or more personally, why do I consider it a grace and a privilege to be here? First, when Bernard of Clairvaux wrote those words, that song, a thousand years ago and said, what language shall I borrow to thank the dearest friend? He was expressing a universal human experience, namely, that human language does not suffice as an adequate expression of the greatest realities in the universe. What language shall I borrow? So, one answer to his question that God gave in his word and that the church has given for 4,000 years is the language of music. I will borrow the language of singing.

The sing conference exists because the realities of the Christian faith are so glorious, so great, so beautiful, so valuable, they will never, never be adequately expressed by written or spoken language alone. They must be sung, hence the sing conference. That's my first explanation for why the conference exists and why I'm honored to be here.

Here's number two. It comes from an interaction over the last 50 years with my wife. Why is it a grace that I'm here and why does this conference exist can be seen if I tell you about this interaction.

So, when we traveled together, which we did yesterday coming down here on the plane, and which we've done for 52 years together, I have said to her countless times in airports, on airports, on elevators, I'm so glad that you can go with me. It makes me happy that we can do this together. And do you know that never in five decades, never once has she said, you are so selfish.

It makes you glad that I'm along. Makes you happy that we can do this together. You are so selfish.

Makes you glad, makes you happy. Never once has she said that. The reason that this conference exists is found in the answer to the question, why would she never think to say that? Why would it never enter her mind to say that? Because the worth and the glory that we see in others is measured by the gladness that we have in their presence.

My pleasure in her presence is a tribute. It's not selfishness, it's celebration. My pleasure is a measure of her treasure to me.

And so it is with God and worship. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him and his presence as our dearest friend. God has given singing to his people as one of the most precious and powerful expressions of our gladness in his glory.

It's the gladness of Godward singing, especially through suffering, as Joni said last night and say it again. It's the gladness of Godward singing, especially through obedient suffering, that makes God's glory shine most brightly. So for those two reasons, I'm thankful to be here, and this conference exists.

Now, my task as part of it in these last few minutes is to draw out some of the connections between the gladness of Godward singing and the finishing of the great task of the great work of God. The great commission to gather God's elect from all the peoples of the world, or as Isaiah 35 says, to see all the ransomed of the Lord come to Zion with singing and everlasting joy upon their heads. So I have five connections to draw your attention to.

I'll just point to them, and you can trace them out later, and I'll give you a scripture for each one. I'll list them for you right now, and then we'll take them one at a time. Number one, the gladness of Godward singing sends lovers of Christ to the nations.

Number two, the gladness of Godward singing sustains the servants of Christ among the nations. Number three, the gladness of Godward singing sets the captives free in the nations. Four, the gladness of Godward singing shows the all-satisfying glory of Christ to the nations.

And five, the gladness of Godward singing is a sign that the kings of the earth belong to Christ. Those are the five connections I want you to see, and oh how I hope they will turn hundreds of you into goers and the rest into radical senders. Number one, the gladness of Godward singing sends the lovers of Christ to the nations.

Psalms 96, sing to the Lord, bless his name, tell of his salvation from day to day, declare his glory among the nations. While you're singing, do that. His marvelous works among all the peoples, for great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.

How many thousands of missionaries have heard their call in Psalm 96? Declare his glory among the nations. Do you hear that? Declare his glory among the nations. Sing to the Lord a new song there to them.

Every year Bethlehem, when I was a pastor there for 33 years, we would have a pastors, I mean a missions conference, and the close of the missions conference we gave an invitation to all those who in the conference for the last two Sundays had heard or felt what they sensed to be a compelling leading of the Lord to cross a culture, to take the gospel, spending the rest of their lives to do it. That's a pretty high standard for an invitation. We would sing, we would stop, there would be no music and no head bowed and no eye closed, and I would wait.

And Chuck, who helped me with that for so many years, sitting over there as a precious partner in it, our worship leader, and they'd come. They'd just get up out of their seats and come. 20, 50, one time 200, and then we'd get them connected with the nurture program and then we'd close with a song.

We rest on thee, our shield and our defender. Thine is the battle, thine shall be the praise, when passing through the gates of pearly splendor. Victors, we rest with thee through endless days.

Because that's the hymn that the five Ecuador martyrs were singing when they were speared to death in 1956. And I believe with all my heart that as they walked to the front uncertain and struggling, but sensing God's leading to give their lives to world missions, that call was sealed with that song. That's the first point.

Singing sends lovers of Christ to the nations. Number two, the gladness of Godward singing sustains the servants of Christ among the nations. On the night in which he was betrayed, we don't often say this, he sang a hymn.

Mark 14, 26, and when they had sung a hymn, Jesus and the 11th, when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And the next thing out of Jesus' mouth after singing that song, whatever it was, was, you will all fall away. For it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.

In other words, here's the greatest missionary that ever was from heaven to earth, crossed the biggest barrier in every way, facing the greatest test of his life, and he wants to sing with his men. And I love it when men sing. Oh, I love it when men sing.

Staffs, elders, they should sing and strengthen their hands for Gethsemane. I know they all fell away. He didn't.

And my guess is that decades later, when they look back, they remembered the song, and it gave them strength, even though they blew it that night. They didn't blow it forever. The second point, then, singing sustains servants of Christ among the nations.

Number three, the gladness of Godward singing sets free the captives in the nations. Acts 16, about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake. Is that a coincidence? Singing in prison at midnight, ankles in the stocks, welts on the back from being beaten, and God shakes the world.

It's not an accident. It's not a coincidence. And they were set free.

About my second year in the pastorate, I got a call at 10 o'clock at night. I was green. I didn't know anything except my Bible, and the students on the other end said, we have a woman in our room here who's demon-possessed, and we're not going to let her go until she's delivered.

Would you come help? I've never been involved in a demon possession before, and I called Tom Steller, my associate, because Jesus said, go two by two, and we went, and she was there. Her name was, well, I won't tell you her name. She had a little pen knife that she was threatening people with, you know, they kind of have a blade about that long, so I left my winter coat on, because I thought it wouldn't go in very far if she stuck me, and I knew one thing, that when Jesus fought the devil, he quoted Scripture.

That's all I knew, right? And so I opened my little teeny carry-around Bible and read Scripture. She would knock the Bible out of my hand. They said, that's not her.

That's not her face. That's not her voice. These are six college students, bravest kids I've ever seen.

And finally, after my effort to read her into deliverance, someone started to sing, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Alleluia. And then they began to put words to it, you know, like you've done in your groups back in the 80s anyway.

Jesus is Lord. Thank you, Jesus. And she went berserk, hit the floor, flopped around like a fish, crying to Satan not to leave her, and went totally limp, and I was scared witless that we'd killed her.

And she came to. Her face was totally different. Her voice was totally different.

I handed her my Bible, opened it to Romans 8, and I said, would you read this for us? She read the entirety of Romans 8. She was in church the next Sunday. What would you do if you would pull away from that and say God delivers people through song? He does. And I could tell you more stories, not about demon deliverance, but a lot of other kinds of deliverance through song.

So that's number three. Godward singing sets captives free, both Christians in prison and unbelievers in demonic power. Number four, the gladness of Godward singing shows the all-satisfying glory of Christ to the nations.

So what does it mean that missionaries of Christ sing and call the nations? Like we just sang, they call the nations to join them in singing. What does that mean? I'm singing as a missionary. I'm calling you.

Let the nations be glad. Sing for joy to the Lord. What does that mean? It means that the Great Commission is a global command of God to be glad in God.

That's our command. Let the nations be glad. Let them sing for joy.

Join us in joy. That's our mission. That's our mission.

And we call them to it not because it's the right thing to do, but it's the inevitable thing to do when you've tasted the forgiveness of sins, when you've tasted the rescue from hell, when you've tasted the imputation of righteousness, adoption into God's family, the hope of being with God forever, shining like the sun in the kingdom of your Father. Will you not sing? It's not a burden. It's an invitation to a banquet.

And in the banquet, we have the confidence that every burden will be lifted and every inner disinclination to sing, which so many of you have, will be taken away and you will be free. And every single born-again person in this room will sing in that day, either like a nightingale or like the trumpet of God. Number five, the gladness of God, the gladness of Godward singing is a sign that the kingdoms of the earth belong to Christ.

Psalm 138. All the kings of the earth shall give thanks to you, O Lord. O Lord, for they have heard of thy words, of the words of your mouth, and they shall sing of the ways of the Lord.

That's all the kings of the earth are going to sing to the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. Or Isaiah 34, 16, they lift up their voices, they sing for joy over the majesty of the Lord. They shout from the west, from the ends of the earth, we hear songs of praise to the righteous one.

So this is the sign, singing, global singing among all the powers is the sign of the triumph of Christ among the nations. A song of joy to the majesty of the Lord. So the singer gets the joy, and the Savior gets the glory, the praises.

That's the way God has set up the world. He's designed the world so that God gets the glory among the nations, and the nations get the gladness in God. Neither happens without the other.

God doesn't get the glory he should have without the gladness in the nations. The nations will never be glad in God, except through knowing, loving, delighting, and being satisfied by the glory of God. There is one united goal for the universe, namely the glory of God in the gladness of the nations in God.

A gladness that is of such a nature that it cries out, what language shall I borrow? And answers, I will borrow the language of singing, and I will summon the nations to join me. So, Father, I pray that the upshot of the entire conference and these last couple of hours in particular would be the means by which you would catapult hundreds of people singing to the nations. I ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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