

Exposition on Psalm 149

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of singing a new song of peace, charity, and love, and exulting in the glory of the saints, who see God through faith and rejoice in their conscience.

Scripture: Psalm 149:1, Psalm 149:4, Proverbs 20:9, Matthew 10:34, Matthew 19:6, Matthew 19:21, 2 Corinthians 5:1, Hebrews 4:12, Revelation 18:6

Topics: "Praise And Worship", "Church Unity"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of praising the Lord in voice, understanding, and good works, emphasizing the need to sing a new song unto Him. He contrasts the old song of earthly desires with the new song of eternal love and charity. Augustine highlights the Church of the saints as a spiritual union that transcends earthly boundaries, calling for unity and charity among believers. He delves into the joy of seeing God and the eternal glory of the saints, encouraging believers to exult in God's love and salvation. Augustine also discusses the power of the Word of God as a two-edged sword and the role of saints in executing God's judgment with love and righteousness.

Transcript

1. Let us praise the Lord both in voice, and in understanding, and in good works; and, as this Psalm exhorts, let us sing unto Him a new song. It begins: Sing ye to the Lord a new song. His praise is in the Church of the Saints Psalm 149:1. The old man has an old song, the new man a new song. The Old Testament is an old song, the New Testament a new song. In the Old Testament are temporal and earthly promises. Whoso loves earthly things sings an old song; let him that desires to sing a new song, love the things of eternity. Love itself is new and eternal; therefore is it ever new, because it never grows old....And this song is of peace, this song is of charity. Whoso severs himself from the union of the saints, sings not a new song; for he has followed old strife, not new charity. In new charity what is there? Peace, the bond of an holy society, a spiritual union, a building of living stones. Where is this? Not in one place, but throughout the whole world. This is said in another Psalm, Sing unto the Lord, all the earth. From this is understood, that he who sings not with the whole earth, sings an old song, whatever words proceed out of his mouth....We have already said, brethren, that all the earth sings a new song. He who sings not with the whole earth a new song, let him sing what he will, let his tongue sound forth Halleluia, let him utter it all day and all night, my ears are not so much bent to hear the voice of the singer, but I seek the deeds of the doer. For I ask, and say, What is it that you sing? He answers, Halleluia. What is Halleluia? Praise ye the Lord. Come, let us praise the Lord together. If you praise the Lord, and I praise the Lord, why are we at

variance? Charity praises the Lord, discord blasphemes the Lord....

2. The field of the Lord is the world, not Africa. It is not with the Lord's field, as it is without these fields of ours, where Getulia bears sixty or an hundred fold, Numidia only ten fold: everywhere fruit is borne to Him, both an hundred fold, and sixty fold, and thirty fold: only do thou choose what you will be, if you think to belong to the Lord's Cross. The Church then of the saints is the Catholic Church. The Church of the saints is not the Church of heretics. The Church of the saints is that which God first prefigured before it was seen, and then set forth that it might be seen. The Church of the saints was heretofore in writings, now it is in nations: the Church of the saints was heretofore only read of, now it is both read of and seen. When it was only read of, it was believed; now it is seen, and is spoken against. His praise is in the children of the kingdom, that is, the Church of the saints.

3. Let Israel rejoice in Him who made Him Psalm 149:2. What is, Israel? Seeing God. He who sees God, rejoices in Him by whom he was made. What is it then, brethren? We have said that we belong to the Church of the saints: do we already see God? And how are we Israel, if we see not? There is one kind of sight belonging to this present time; there will be another belonging to the time hereafter: the sight which now is, is by faith; the sight which is to be will be in reality. If we believe, we see; if we love, we see: see what? God. Ask John: God is love; 1 John 4:16 let us bless His holy Name, and rejoice in God by rejoicing in love. Whoso has love, why send we him afar to see God? Let him regard his own conscience, and there he sees God....And let the sons of Zion exult in their King. The sons of the Church are Israel. For Zion indeed was one city, which fell: amid its ruins certain saints dwelt after the flesh: but the true Zion, the true Jerusalem (for Zion and Jerusalem are one), is eternal in the heavens, 2 Corinthians 5:1 and is our mother. Galatians 4:26 She it is that has given us birth, she is the Church of the saints, she has nourished us, she, who is in part a pilgrim, in part abiding in the heavens. In the part which abides in heaven is the bliss of angels, in the part which wanders in this world is the hope of the righteous. Of the former is said, Glory to God in the highest; of the latter, and on earth peace to men of good will. Luke 2:14 Let those then who, being in this life, groan, and long for their country, run by love, not by bodily feet; let them seek not ships but wings, let them lay hold on the two wings of love. What are the two wings of love? The love of God, and of our neighbour. For now we are pilgrims, we sigh, we groan. There has come to us a letter from our country: we read it to you. And the sons of Zion shall exult in their King. The Son of God, who made us, was made one of us: and He rules us as our King, because He is our Creator, who made us. But He by whom we were made is the same as He by whom we are ruled, and we are Christians because He is Christ. He is called Christ from Chrism, that is, Anointing....Give to the Priest somewhat to offer. What could man find which he could give as a clean victim? What victim? What clean thing can a sinner offer? O unrighteous, O sinful man, whatever you offer is unclean, and somewhat that is clean must be offered for you....Let then the Priest that is clean offer Himself, and cleanse you. This is what Christ did. He found in man nothing clean for Him to offer for man: He offered Himself as a clean Victim. Happy Victim, true Victim, spotless Offering. He offered not then what we gave Him; yea rather, He offered what He took of us, and offered it clean. For of us He took flesh, and this He offered. But where took He it? In the womb of the Virgin Mary, that He might offer it clean for us unclean. He is our King, He is our Priest, in Him let us rejoice.

4. Let them praise His Name in chorus Psalm 149:3. What means chorus? Many know what a chorus is: nay, as we are speaking in a town, almost all know. A chorus is the union of singers. If we sing in chorus, let us sing in concord. If any one's voice is out of harmony in a chorus of singers, it offends the ear, and throws the chorus into confusion. If the voice of one echoing discordantly troubles the harmony of them

who sing, how does the discord of heresy throw into confusion the harmony of them who praise. The whole world is now the chorus of Christ. The chorus of Christ sounds harmoniously from east to west. Let them sing a psalm unto Him with timbrel and psaltery. Wherefore takes he to him the timbrel and psaltery? That not the voice alone may praise, but the works too. When timbrel and psaltery are taken, the hands harmonize with the voice. So too do thou, whenever you sing, Halleluia, deal forth your bread to the hungry, clothe the naked, take in the stranger: then does not only your voice sound, but your hand sounds in harmony with it, for your deeds agree with your words. You have taken to you an instrument, and your fingers agree with your tongue. Nor must we keep back the mystical meaning of the timbrel and psaltery. On the timbrel leather is stretched, on the psaltery gut is stretched; on either instrument the flesh is crucified. How well did he sing a psalm on timbrel and psaltery, who said, the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world? Galatians 6:14 This psaltery or timbrel He wishes you to take up, who loves a new song, who teaches you, saying to you, Whosoever wills to be My disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. Matthew 16:24 Let him not set down his psaltery, let him not set down his timbrel, let him stretch himself out on the wood, and be dried from the lust of the flesh. The more the strings are stretched, the more sharply do they sound. The Apostle Paul then, in order that his psaltery might sound sharply, what said he? Stretching forth unto those things which are before, etc. Philippians 3:13 He stretched himself: Christ touched him; and the sweetness of truth sounded.

5. For the Lord has dealt kindly among His people Psalm 149:4. What dealing so kindly, as to die for the ungodly? What dealing so kindly, as with righteous Blood to blot out the handwriting against the sinner? What dealing so kindly, as to say, I regard not what you were, be ye now what you were not? He deals kindly in converting him that was turned away, in aiding him that is fighting, in crowning the conqueror. And the meek He shall lift up in salvation. For the proud too are lifted up, but not in salvation: the meek are lifted in salvation, the proud in death: that is, the proud lift up themselves, and God humbles them: the meek humble themselves, and God lifts them up.

6. The saints shall exult in glory Psalm 149:5. I would say somewhat important about the glory of the saints. For there is no one who loves not glory. But the glory of fools, popular glory as it is called, has snares to deceive, so that a man, influenced by the praises of vain men, shall be willing to live in such fashion as to be spoken of by men, whosoever they be, in whatsoever way. Hence it is that men, rendered mad, and puffed up with pride, empty within, without swollen, are willing ever to ruin their fortunes by bestowing them on stage-players, actors, men who fight with wild beasts, charioteers. What sums they give, what sums they spend! They lavish the powers not only of their patrimony, but of their minds too. They scorn the poor, because the people shouts not that the poor should be given to, but the people do shout that the fighter with wild beasts be given to. When then no shout is raised to them, they refuse to spend; when madmen shout to them, they are mad too: nay, all are mad, both performer, and spectator, and the giver. This mad glory is blamed by the Lord, is offensive in the eyes of the Almighty....Thou choosest to clothe the fighter with wild beasts, who may be beaten, and make you blush: Christ is never conquered; He has conquered the devil, He has conquered for you, and to you, and in you; such a conqueror as this you choose not to clothe. Wherefore? Because there is less shouting, less madness about it. They then who delight in such glory, have an empty conscience. Just as they drain their chests, to send garments as presents, so do they empty their conscience, so as to have nothing precious therein.

7. But the saints who exult in glory, no need is there for us to say how they exult: just hear the verse of the Psalm which follows: The saints shall exult in glory, they shall rejoice in their beds: not in theatres, or amphitheatres, or circuses, or follies, or market places, but in their chambers. What is, in their chambers?

In their hearts. Hear the Apostle Paul exulting in his closet: For this is our glory, the testimony of our conscience. 2 Corinthians 1:12 On the other hand, there is reason to fear lest any be pleasing to himself, and so seem to be proud, and boast of his conscience. For every one ought to exult with fear, for that wherein he exults is God's gift, not his own desert. For there be many that please themselves, and think themselves righteous; and there is another passage which goes against them, which says, Who shall boast that he has a clean heart, and that he is pure from sin? Proverbs 20:9 There is then, so to speak, a limit to glorying in our conscience, namely, to know that your faith is sincere, your hope sure, your love without dissimulation. The exultations of God are in their mouths Psalm 149:6. In such wise shall they rejoice in their closets, as not to attribute to themselves that they are good, but praise Him from whom they have what they are, by whom they are called to attain to what they are not, and from whom they hope for perfection, to whom they give thanks, because He has begun.

8. And swords sharpened on both sides in their hands. This sort of weapon contains a great mystical meaning, in that it is sharp on both sides. By swords sharpened on both sides, we understand the Word of the Lord: Hebrews 4:12 it is one sword, but therefore are they called many, because there are many mouths and many tongues of the saints. How is it two edged? It speaks of things temporal, it speaks also of things eternal. In both cases it proves what it says, and him whom it strikes, it severs from the world. Is not this the sword whereof the Lord said, I am not come to send peace upon earth, but a sword? Matthew 10:34 Observe how He came to divide, how He came to sever. He divides the saints, He divides the ungodly, He severs from you that which hinders you. The son wills to serve God, the father wills not: the sword comes, the Word of God comes, and severs the son from the father....Wherefore then is it in their hands, not in their tongues? And swords, it says, sharpened on both sides in their hands. By in their hands, he means in power. They received then the word of God in power, to speak where they would, to whom they would, neither to fear power, nor to despise poverty. For they had in their hands a sword; where they would they brandished it, handled it, smote with it: and all this was in the power of the preachers. For if the Word be not in their hands, why is it written, The Word of the Lord was put in the hand of the Prophet Haggai? Surely, brethren, God set not His Word in His fingers. What is meant by, was put in his hand? It was put into his power to preach the Word of the Lord. Lastly, we can understand these hands in another way also. For they who spoke had the word of God in their tongues, they who wrote, in their hands.

9. Now, brethren, you see the saints armed: observe the slaughter, observe their glorious battles. For if there be a commander, there must be soldiers; if soldiers, an enemy; if a warfare, a victory. What have these done who had in their hands swords sharpened on both sides? To do vengeance on the nations. See whether vengeance have not been done on the nations. Daily is it done: we do it ourselves by speaking. Observe how the nations of Babylon are slain. She is repaid twofold: for so is it written of her, repay her double for what she has done. Revelation 18:6 How is she repaid double? The saints wage war, they draw their swords twice sharpened; thence come defeats, slaughters, severances: how is she repaid double? When she had power to persecute the Christians, she slew the flesh indeed, but she crushed not God: now she is repaid double, for the Pagans are extinguished and the idols are broken....And lest you should think that men are really smitten with the sword, blood really shed, wounds made in the flesh, he goes on and explains, upbraidings among the peoples. What is upbraidings? Reproof. Let the sword twice sharpened go forth from you, delay not. Say to your friend, if yet you have one left to whom to say it, What kind of man are you, who hast abandoned Him by whom you were made, and worshippes what He made? Better is the Workman, than that which He works. When he begins to blush, when he begins to feel compunction, you have made a wound with your sword, it has reached the heart, he is about to die, that

he may live.

10. That they may bind their kings in fetters, and their nobles in bonds of iron Psalm 149:8. To execute upon them the judgment written Psalm 149:9. The kings of the Gentiles are to be bound in fetters, and their nobles in fetters, and that of iron....For these verses which we are beginning to explain are obscure. For for this purpose God willed to set down some of His verses obscurely, not that anything new should be dug out of them, but that what was already well known, might be made new by being obscurely set forth.

We know that kings have been made Christians; we know that the nobles of the Gentiles have been made Christians. They are being made so at this day; they have been, they shall be; the swords twice sharpened are not idle in the hands of the saints. How then do we understand their being bound in fetters and chains of iron? You know, beloved and learned brethren (learned I call you, for you have been nourished in the Church, and are accustomed to hear God's Word read), that God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong, and the foolish things of the world has God chosen to confound the wise, and things which are not, just as things which are, that the things which are may be brought to nought.. ..It is said by the Lord, If you will be perfect, go sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and come, follow Me, and you shall have treasure in heaven.

Matthew 19:21 Many of the nobles did this, but they ceased to be nobles of the Gentiles, they chose rather to be poor in this world, noble in Christ. But many retain their former nobility, retain their royal powers, and yet are Christians. These are, as it were, in fetters and in bonds of iron. How so? They received fetters, to keep them from going to things unlawful, the fetters of wisdom, Sirach 6:25 the fetters of the Word of God. Wherefore then are they bonds of iron and not bonds of gold?

They are iron so long as they fear: let them love, and they shall be golden. Observe, beloved, what I say. You have heard just now the Apostle John, There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. 1 John 4:18 This is the bond of iron. And yet unless a man begin through fear to worship God, he will not attain to love. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The beginning then is bonds of iron, the end a collar of gold. For it is said of wisdom, a collar of gold around your neck.

Sirach 6:24 ...There comes to us a man powerful in this world, his wife offends him, and perhaps he has desired another man's wife who is more beautiful, or another woman who is richer, he wishes to put away the one he has, yet he does it not. He hears the words of the servant of God, he hears the Prophet, he hears the Apostle, and he does it not; he is told by one in whose hands is a sword twice sharpened, You shall not do it: it is not lawful for you: God allows you not to put away your wife, save for the cause of fornication.

Matthew 5:32 He hears this, he fears, and does it not....Listen, young men; the bonds are of iron, seek not to set your feet within them; if you do, you shall be bound more tightly with fetters. Such fetters the hands of the Bishop make strong for you. Do not men who are thus fettered fly to the Church, and are here loosed? Men do fly hither, desiring to be rid of their wives: here they are more tightly bound: no man looses these fetters. What God joined together, let not man put asunder.

Matthew 19:6 But these bonds are hard. Who but knows it? This hardness the Apostles grieved at, and said, If this be the case with a wife, it is not good to marry. Matthew 19:10 If the bonds be of iron, it is not good to set our feet within them. And the Lord said, All men cannot receive this saying, but let him that can receive it, receive it. Matthew 19:11-12 Are you bound unto a wife? Seek not to be freed, for you are bound with bonds of iron. Are you free from a wife, seek not a wife; bind not yourself with bonds of iron.

11. To do in them the judgment that is written. This is the judgment which the saints do throughout all nations. Wherefore written? Because these things were before written, and now are fulfilled. Behold now they are being done: erst they were read, and were not done. And he has concluded thus, this glory have all His saints. Throughout the whole world, throughout entire nations, this the saints do, thus are they glorified, thus do they exalt God with their mouths, thus do they rejoice in their beds, thus do they exult in their glory, thus are they lifted up in salvation, thus do they sing a new song, thus in heart and voice and life they say Halleluia. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-augustine/exposition-on-psalm-149/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net