

The Singing Savior

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TWO AUCA INDIANS sang a haunting chant of worship to God before a great Missionary congress in Berlin. One of the singers had driven his spear into the bodies of the missionary martyrs who had landed in the Ecuadorian jungle to tell the love of Jesus. But now that love had changed his cry of blood-lust to a song of praise.

Where Christ comes, song comes, for Jesus Christ is a singing savior. “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation, will I sing thy praise” (Heb. 2:12).

The writer to the Hebrews ascribes to Jesus these words taken from Psalm 22. That Psalm begins with the cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Jesus made that cry His own on the cross. But the Hebrews passages reminds us that the whole Psalm is Christ’s—note only the cry of abandonment at the beginning, but also the vow of victory at the climax (v. 22).

Jesus had sung that Psalm often before He went to the cross. Indeed, He knew and sang all the Psalms in the congregation of God’s people. Think of the meaning the Psalms had when He sang them! If you would open a new experience of worship, meditate on the Psalms as the Psalms of Jesus.

You have noticed that there are “we” Psalms, written in the first person plur-

al: “We are thy people and the sheep of thy pasture” (Ps. 100:3). Jesus sings those Psalms with us. He is the singing Shepherd; we are the lost sheep He has brought home rejoicing. He sings over us (Zeph. 3:17), and with us, and for us.

Jesus can sing the “we” Psalms *with* us because he sings the “I” Psalms *for* us as our Savior. “Lo, I am come; in the roll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God” (Ps. 40:7, 8).

Many of the “I” Psalms were written by King David. He wrote, not as a private individual, but as the Lord’s Anointed, called to suffer as God’s servant. David’s cry, uttered in the Spirit, anticipates the voice of Christ. His shout of victory is made ready for his greater Song and Lord (Ps. 110:1; Matt. 22:43–45). Jesus, after His resurrection, explained the Psalms to show His disciples that He must suffer these things and enter into His glory (Luke 24:26, 44).

CHRIST COULD EXPLAIN HIS SUFFERINGS and glory from the Psalms because He experienced the agony and the ecstasy the Psalms predicted. His cry, “Why has thou forsaken me?” came from the pit of His anguish. Abandoned by His friends, ringed about by His enemies—seen in the Psalm as wild bulls, roaring lions, baying hounds—Jesus knew the ultimate horror, the hell of forsakenness by His Father. The God who promised

never to fail or forsake His own did forsake His beloved Son, in order not to break His word but to keep it. In the dark moment of that abandonment both the Father and the Son paid the price of our redemption forever.

What songs of agony Christ sings—the psalms of His suffering that sealed salvation! Listen, and learn of Him hymns that know the fellowship of His sufferings, hymns that can come from a cross, or rise from a prison cell at midnight. The singing Savior does not lead songs modeled on sugary commercials or the pounding pornography of the disco scene. Sterner, stronger, deeper, His songs carry us through the valley of the shadow of death.

Our Lord became our brother to die in our place. He teaches us honest songs, heart-cries to God: “My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth” (Ps. 102:3).

Yet Christ’s psalms of suffering rise in faith to God. In abandonment He cries “Why?” but His question leaps from the depths to the heights. “My God!” He cries, even in His forsakenness. “Thou art holy” (Ps. 22:3) ... “save me from the lion’s mouth” (v. 21). Indeed, even before God answers, the anguish of His Anointed turns to a vow of praise: “In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (v. 22).

Christ who sang in suffering now sings in triumph. Peter on Pentecost preached Christ’s resurrection from the Psalms. It is Christ who says, “Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; neither wilt

thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27).

Read all of Peter’s quotations from Psalm 16, and reflect on how the whole applies to Christ. So, too, do such parallel passages as these: “I shall be satisfied when I awake with beholding thy form” (Ps. 17:15); “Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Ps. 73:24).

JESUS CHRIST IS THE SINGING VICTOR of the Psalms, the Son (Ps. 2:7). seated on God’s right hand (Ps. 110:1). He is at once the righteous man who ascends into the hill of the Lord (Ps. 24:3–5) and the King of glory for whom the everlasting gates are thrown open (Ps. 24:7–10).

When Jesus sang the Passover Psalms in the upper room with Simon Peter, and James, and John, His Father heard and all heaven listened: “The Lord is my strength and song; and he is become my salvation” (Ps. 118:14). The song of Moses (Ex. 15:2) and of the prophets (Isa. 12:2) became the song of the Lamb. Even the angels’ song in the fields of Bethlehem could not compare with the song of the Sin-Bearer.

But now the risen Savior sings in glory. He is the sweet singer of Israel, the choirmaster of heaven. He is not ashamed to call us brethren, but sings in the midst of His assembled saints in the heavenly Zion and on earth where two or three are gathered in His name.

Praise His name, the Christ who sings in the congregation sings a missionary hymn among the Gentiles. Paul reminds us that Jesus has fulfilled the mission of Israel as the great Minister of the cir-

cumcision, “that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.” Then Paul ascribes to Jesus this verse from the Psalms: “Therefore will I give praise to thee among the Gentiles and sing unto thy name” (Rom. 15:9; Ps. 18:49).

Jesus sings among the nations. His missionary hymn is a doxology, calling the Gentiles to join Him in singing praise to His Father’s name.

In the old praise was centered in Jerusalem, in the courts of God’s house (Ps. 116:18, 19). The singing people of God called on all nations to praise the Lord of the whole earth, whose salvation was seen in Zion (Ps. 98:3, 4). The prophets picture the nations streaming in to praise God in His City (Isa. 2:2, 3; Zeph. 3:9, 10).

In the New Testament the missionary direction seems to be reversed. Jesus sends His disciples from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:18, 19). But the doxology of missions remains. Jesus Christ has all the power, in heaven and earth. He ascends to the heavenly Jerusalem and calls the nations to gather

with Him in praising the God of salvation (Heb. 12:22–29).

Our evangelism must be doxological. We are God’s holy nation, a people for God’s own possession that we “May show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9b). As we sing of God’s amazing grace among the nations, Jesus Himself leads our praise. We do not bear witness defensively or proudly, but in the joy of worship. Like the shepherds who saw the Savior we go on our way glorifying and praising God.

You needn’t hum a hymn to begin your personal witness to a neighbor, but if your heart is singing praise, then your witness will ring true. And a praising church, full of gospel singing, is a church in which visitors will say, “God is among you, indeed!” (1 Cor. 14:25).

By the lament of His prayer and the pæan of His praise Jesus Christ turns our sighing into singing and gives us the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Come to heaven’s festival of music; come to Jesus, who makes the tongue of the dumb to sing. HALLELUJAH! 