

People sing for a variety of reasons. Some break out into song because they just got a job promotion. Some can't hold back singing anytime they're in the shower. Some will belt out a few notes if they're doing karaoke, like some did on Friday at the Fall Family Festival. And I suppose some sing because that's what their teacher is making them do here this Sunday.

The song before us this morning is for freedom. Not freedom anyone currently has but freedom that will be some day. Isaiah in his prophecy had been sharing some difficult events that would happen in the future for the Israelites. They could expect forced slavery, destruction of the temple, and death. But Isaiah wrote their hope was in the dead stump of a nation that God would make a fresh green shoot grow that would save the nation; some day in the future. Before that they would go through some major heartaches and suffering. Still they sang.

What's your reason to sing? Do you have one? Your life might be filled with major heartaches or suffering. You might be facing difficulties and challenges of all shapes and sizes. Only you know your true struggles. Yet Isaiah is telling you we have a promise of hope for the future. It may not have much beat, it may not have rhythm, but it's a song. The prophet is speaking to each of us...

**Sing Isaiah's song of praise  
God's long awaited deliverance is here  
We share God's name in the world**

Centuries before Isaiah wrote his prophecy, the nation of Israel was living in Egypt. Actually for over 400 years they were oppressed and treated like slaves. All along God promised deliverance, and boy did he deliver. Ten plagues, the last of which was the death of all the firstborn, God's presence separating Israel from the Egyptian army, and a march across the Red Sea and they knew God was delivering them. **"The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation."** It was a spontaneous song about the promised deliverance from God.

When Isaiah shared his prophecy the Israelites might have been thinking about this song. Soon the powerful nation of Babylon would come in and carry the Israelites off to oppression and slavery all over again. Why? Isaiah shares with them that as a whole they have turned their backs on God. They worship other gods and don't want anything to do with the true God. They give their time to other pursuits and themselves. God just wasn't important enough to them. This brought out God's anger. Babylon was punishment.

You might be thinking, "Why not just let them go if they don't want him?" True, God could've in anger let them be destroyed for their disobedience to him. Terrible thing when God turns his back on someone. Now what about your situation? Has the busyness of your life cut off your time with God too many times so that you've turned your back on him? Do you find other things to occupy first place in your life, like money, self interests, or family? Or maybe you're one who thinks that suffering and difficulty are signs God doesn't care about us. The truth is your sin has distanced you from God. Your sin brings about God's anger. He has every right to say to you, "Why should I care. Why not just let you go?"

Maybe God's anger over your sin doesn't bother you. It's not like mom yelling at us or a boss screaming at us. God doesn't speak directly to us so what's the big deal. Well consider this, you're going to die. Ignoring it and forgetting about it won't help. You're going to die. And that really begs the question. Say there is something after this, something more than six feet deep. Say there's a place that's good and place that's bad. Where do you hope to be? You might not care, but I can assure you it's in your future. Hell is very real, and for those whose sins aren't taken care of, those who are still under the anger of God because of sinfulness, hell is very much a reality.

So we have reason to fear God. Yet listen to what Isaiah shared, **"Although you were angry with me..."** What's that, God was angry? **"Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me."** Fantastic news! But how and why? Stores don't just get generous and start turning the other way as you walk out of the store without paying. God didn't just get generous one day and decide to look the other way while we stole from him. You sinned. God got angry. That sin needed to be punished and it was. God's anger was absorbed in Christ's death on the cross. Death and suffering for sin was meant for us, but God punished a Savior instead. God's undeserved love, his grace, turned his anger on Jesus so he might turn to us to comfort us.

And now we sing. The long awaited deliverance God promised is here. We're saved. Our sins don't condemn us anymore because they've been condemned in Christ Jesus. **"Surely it is God who saves me, I will trust in him and not be afraid; for the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my Savior"** the refrain we heard this morning goes. That's what we need to know. God's anger is turned away from us by God's love for us in Christ. Surely he saves me, surely he is my Savior.

The countdown to Christmas is almost on. Soon enough "this many days till Christmas" updates will come regularly from our children. Children count because it's something they can't wait for. Christmas morning brings the natural reaction of yelling or cheering, maybe even singing. Soon though it's not enough to celebrate by themselves; so they go and get mom and dad. The joy and overwhelming happiness is something they want to share. So to with God's deliverance, our joy and happiness makes us want to sing. Certainly we can't keep it to ourselves. We want to share God's name in the world.

If I say George Washington, you get a picture of who I'm talking about. You might think 1<sup>st</sup> president, Father of our country, truth teller. If I say Taylor Swift you might get a picture too. You might think song writer, good singer, young new artist. Their names say something about who they are, what they do, and how popular they are. The Lord is no different. When people hear his name they get a picture in their mind. Creator of universe, judge of living and dead, Savior of world.

God's name is precious to him because it speaks to who he is. It's precious to us because of what he has done for us. But don't we sometimes find ourselves casually throwing his name around. We speak his name as the punch line to jokes. We slip his name in to emphasize sentences. We use his name to make oaths over trivial things that we don't really want too. To use God's name, or Jesus' name, or the Holy Spirit in this way is to trample on his good name and reputation. And when it comes to sharing his name we trot out a whole host of excuses. Even for simple opportunities like carrying bags through the neighborhood to deliver to doorknobs. We have excuses for that too. Not enough time, kids tournaments, family event that's too important. Aren't these excuses and others like them really just that, sinful reasons that don't stack up.

We might hold George Washington or Taylor Swift in high regard because of what they've accomplished. God is no different. We couldn't live up to the perfection God demands. Just look at our list of excuses for proof. But his Word tells us how he came low and lived perfection in our place. God cannot exist with sin, but his love for human beings who didn't love him should amaze us. The lengths he went to in order that our sins might be removed show his amazing love, his grace. The cross of Jesus is the central point of history. It is the assurance of forgiveness, the promise of deliverance, the message we share.

What's our reaction to this great news? Isaiah says it might include, **"Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations...proclaim...sing to the Lord...let this be known to all the world. Shout aloud...sing for joy."** Each is appropriate; each is a natural reaction to good news. Ultimately this joy we feel can't be kept to ourselves. Telling others so they can join with us in joy must be a goal. Share this wonderful news with someone who doesn't have it so they too can know Jesus and be saved. Get them to sing Isaiah's song of praise with you.