

# Sing Gospel Songs, the Psalms

*Our Public Worship*

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**Bible Text:** Revelation 15:2-4  
**Preached on:** Sunday, November 23, 2008

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Please turn in your Bibles, if you would, to the book of Revelation, the fifteenth chapter, and I will just read a very few verses from Revelation 15, verses two, three, and four.

And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."<sup>1</sup>

Let's pray.

*Father, thank you, again, for your Word. Thank you that you have been pleased to give it to us for our instruction. Thank you that we have the privilege of singing your Word. And we pray, Father, that as we look at this text, for just a short period of time, that you will be pleased to bless us with a better understanding of what we are to do in our singing of your Word. Bless us to this end in the good name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*

A professor of a college in a nearby community wrote a paper that circulated at our seminary. The paper has to do with psalmody. And the professor concludes the paper with a statement something like this. "Exclusive psalmody is not only not necessary, but it is positively sinful."

Well, that puts those of us who sing the psalms in a rather bad light, to say the very least. Our professor friend also suggests that we look at the songs in the book of Revelation to get a better idea of how we ought to conduct ourselves in the public worship of God and what we ought to sing. And so my proposal for us is to following our esteemed professor's advice and look at this song in the book of Revelation, chapter fifteen. What is the outcome when we look at this particular song in Revelation, chapter fifteen? Is our

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 15:2-4

professor friend correct in his statements? To answer these questions, I ask you to work with me as we look at this song. Hopefully we will all come out at the same place.

The song is a song sung by the saints of God. We see this in verse two. “And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.”<sup>2</sup> These are the saints of God. They are victorious over the forces of evil through Jesus Christ. These saints are singing. Verse three indicates this is the case very plainly. “And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.”<sup>3</sup>

Now we notice right away that John joins the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. These are not two songs. They are not two separate songs. They are one song. We gather this from the fact that what follows is one song, not two songs. But how is it that the same song can be both the song of Moses *and* the song of the Lamb?

Well, let’s go back to Exodus, chapter fifteen, and look briefly at a couple of pieces of the song of Moses recorded for us there. Turn with me, if you would, to Exodus chapter fifteen. This is a song sung by the people of God as they came out of the land of Egypt and experienced God’s redemption. They walked on dry land through the Red Sea. Verse one says, “Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD.”<sup>4</sup>

And then if you drop down to verse thirteen it says, “In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed.”<sup>5</sup> Moses speaks of the Lord who redeemed his people and led them out of Egypt and out of bondage. And it was on the basis of his loving kindness, that is, his covenant love, the covenant which he had made with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Remembering that covenant he brought the people out of Egypt.

This verse goes on to say, “In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation.”<sup>6</sup> Not only did God bring them out of Egypt, but God had a plan and a purpose and a place for them to reside. And the song here calls it the holy habitation of God.

And now look down to verse seventeen in Exodus chapter fifteen. “You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance.”<sup>7</sup> The song does not stop with the redemption of God, but goes on to speak about the people being brought into the Promised Land. And it speaks of the people, not only brought into the Promised Land, but also being brought up to the very mountain which God designated for his very dwelling place.

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<sup>2</sup> Revelation 15:2

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 15:3

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 15:1

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 15:13

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 15:17

Verse seventeen, once again. “You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, The place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established.”<sup>8</sup>

This is a reference to the future sanctuary that Solomon would build on Mount Zion. This is a song that looks forward almost 500 years into the future with regard to that which God would do for his people when he would bring them to that mountain, Mount Zion. Solomon would build the temple and God would come down in his glory and dwell in the midst of his people.

And, of course, all of this, all of this, friends, was a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us. God was dwelling as he promised to dwell among his people in that temple and in that sanctuary. But ultimately God is with us in Jesus Christ.

You may remember the little confrontation that Jesus had with the Jewish leaders when they sought for a sign. “The Jews then said to Him, ‘What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’” The Jewish leaders, confounded, said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” John indicates to us in this place that Jesus “was speaking of the temple of His body.”<sup>9</sup> And so we have a foreshadowing, in this song of Moses, a foreshadowing of the coming of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, to dwell among his people.

Now go back to Revelation, chapter fifteen—notice the two fifteens here. When you go back to Revelation fifteen you see that the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb are one song because they both speak about Jesus Christ who is the Lord and the Savior of all.

With this in mind let’s look at the song itself. What does it have to say?

Great and marvelous are Your works,  
O Lord God, the Almighty;  
Righteous and true are Your ways,  
King of the nations!  
Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?  
For You alone are holy;  
For all the nations will come and worship before you,  
For your righteous acts have been revealed.<sup>10</sup>

Do you catch the accent on the sovereignty of God and the lordship of Christ? “O Lord God, the Almighty.”<sup>11</sup> And then also in verse three, “Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See John 2:18-22.

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 15:3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 15:3.

Surely this is a song about Jesus Christ and his lordship over all things. And I submit to you that this is therefore a gospel song. This is a song of the truth of Christ. It is a song concerning the good news of Jesus Christ.

To help you understand this, I would like you to turn to another text, if you would. This time we look at Isaiah, chapter fifty-two, and verse seven. This is quite a familiar text. It is a text that the apostle Paul quotes in Romans chapter 10 with regard to the gospel and to the preaching of the gospel. Isaiah fifty-two and verse seven, “How lovely on the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who announces peace And brings good news of happiness, Who announces salvation, And says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”<sup>13</sup>

Here is a messenger who comes, perhaps from the battle line, perhaps from the battle line where the combat has been fierce. And the message is, the message is, friends, even in the depth of battle and of combat, “Your God reigns.” God is supreme. God is the one who sits on the throne and he disposes all things in accordance with his will.

And this message, “Your God reigns,” happens to be the Old Testament counterpart to what Paul has to say in Romans, chapter ten, “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”<sup>14</sup> Isaiah gives us the Old Testament counterpart of this New Testament confession. And Isaiah says this is good news. This is the gospel. “Your God reigns.” “Jesus is Lord.”

Along this line, do you remember what Peter had to say on the day of Pentecost with regard to Jesus Christ? “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”<sup>15</sup> Yes, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God the Father almighty. He is Lord of all.

And is it not also significant? If you go back to Exodus chapter fifteen and look at the very last words of the song in Exodus 15, what do you find? It is Exodus fifteen and verse eighteen. The song ends with these telling words. “The LORD shall reign forever and ever.”<sup>16</sup> This is the message of Isaiah 52:7 and Revelation 15:3-4.

This is gospel news. This is good news. This is good news we all need to take to heart. And this is the good news Peter, in another place, in his first epistle, tells us is the answer to fear. “Do not fear,” he says. “Do not fear their intimidation and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.”<sup>17</sup> You see, the answer to all of our fears is a

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 52:7.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 10:9.

<sup>15</sup> See Acts 2:36.

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 15:18.

<sup>17</sup> See 1 Peter 3:14-15.

proper understanding of the lordship of Jesus Christ who is the king of all. And in all of this, you have a central message of the Bible from Exodus through Isaiah to Revelation. It is the message that Christ is King.

Now, let's go back to Revelation fifteen. Here we have this message that Christ is King. And since this message is truly good news, as we have said, it is a gospel message. This means the song in Revelation, chapter fifteen, is a gospel song.

But let me point out a couple of other things to you with regard to this song in Revelation fifteen. Let me just read it to you once again. I have the New American Standard Version. Unfortunately, in the New International Version and some of the other versions, the layout of the song is not quite as evident. But listen to it as I read it to you.

Great and marvelous are Your works,  
O Lord God, the Almighty;  
Righteous and true are Your ways,  
King of the nations!  
Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?  
For You alone are holy;  
For all the nations will come and worship before you,  
For your righteous acts have been revealed.<sup>18</sup>

The form of the psalm... Did I say Psalm? The form of this song is that of a psalm. It is given to us in the form of Hebrew poetry. And if any of you have studied Hebrew poetry, there is actually an alternating parallelism in the song.

Listen to it again.

Line one: "Great and marvellous are your works,"<sup>19</sup>

Line two: "O Lord... the Almighty,"<sup>20</sup>

Line three: "Righteous and true are your ways,"<sup>21</sup>

Line four: "King of the nations!"<sup>22</sup>

There is this pattern of alternating parallelisms. This song, friends, is in the form of a psalm. From this perspective, it points us back to the Psalter.

And not only is this song in the form of a psalm, this song also contains the quotation of a psalm. It comes to us in the fourth verse.

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<sup>18</sup> Revelation 15:3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Revelation 15:3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

“Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before you.”<sup>23</sup>

This is a quotation from Psalm 86:9. And if you care to look with me just briefly at Psalm 86 you will notice that this psalm is a song that David sings seeking the Lord.

Verse one. “Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me.”<sup>24</sup>

Verse three. “Be gracious to me, O Lord.”<sup>25</sup>

Verse four. “Make glad the soul of Your servant, For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.”<sup>26</sup>

Verse six. “Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer.”<sup>27</sup>

Verse eight. “There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord.”<sup>28</sup>

And verse nine. “All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And they shall glorify Your name.”<sup>29</sup>

Verse nine is the text which our song in Revelation fifteen picks up. Verse four reads, “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before you.”<sup>30</sup>

This song in Revelation fifteen is not only in the form of a psalm, but it also quotes one of the psalms. And as we have already learned, it is a gospel song. Furthermore, it sets forth the message of the psalms of the Old Testament.

I would like you to look at your Psalter just briefly in this regard, if you would. Turn with me to, first of all, selection 10B. Notice the message of this psalm. It comes in the third stanza and the third line. “The Lord is King through all eternity.” Here is the gospel message. It is the message of the psalm.

And then turn with me, if you would, to Psalm 29. Some of you will find this a little bit more familiar, Psalm 29 and the very last stanza of that psalm. Psalm 29 and the sixth stanza, “The Lord on his throne sat above the great deluge. The Lord on his throne sits as king without cease.” Yes, the Lord is king. Here again we find this basic gospel message.

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<sup>23</sup> Revelation 15:3.

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 86:1.

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 86:3.

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 86:4.

<sup>27</sup> Psalm 86:6.

<sup>28</sup> Psalm 86:8.

<sup>29</sup> Psalm 86:9.

<sup>30</sup> Revelation 15:4.

And then turn to Psalm 93 selection A. How many times have you sung this particular selection? “Jehovah reigns. He is clothed with majesty most bright.” There it is again, the same gospel message, the same good news. The Lord reigns.

Psalm 96, which we sang at the beginning of the service, gives us an exhortation with regard to this same message. “In beautiful and holy robes bring worship to the Lord. All earth before him stand in awe. Proclaim, ‘the Lord is king.’” And so we have that message once again.

Psalm 97 begins with this same refrain. I am looking at selection C. “Jehovah reigns. Let all the earth be joyful.” And so we find this gospel message in the Psalter. And then finally, look at 99C, “The Lord is king indeed.” What therefore are these songs, friends? What are these psalms? They are gospel songs. They are songs that relate the Lordship of Jesus Christ to you and me.

Again, look back at Revelation, chapter fifteen, and this song in Revelation fifteen. This song is in the form of a psalm. This song quotes from the Psalter. This song is a gospel song, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. This song carries the message that the Lord is king, a message that permeates the psalms. What does this song in Revelation fifteen do? It directs our attention back to the psalms of the Old Testament. This is what it does.

And when I hear—when you hear—the words of our professor friend saying, “Exclusive psalmody is not only not necessary, but positively sinful,” you draw back. When he says, “Look at the songs in the book of Revelation for guidance,” you do so. What do you find? In this particular song in the book of Revelation, chapter fifteen, you find a song that is composed like a psalm. You find a song that quotes from the psalms. You find a song that has the message of the psalms, the gospel message that Christ is Lord. You find a song in the book of Revelation that points back to the songs of the Old Testament, to the Old Testament Psalter. I therefore say to you, friends, sing the psalms. Sing the psalms because they are the gospel songs of the Bible.

Do you hear this message? Sing the psalms; they are the gospel songs of the Bible. This message comes to you out of the book of Revelation. Following our professor friend’s advice, this is the conclusion to which we come. Sing the psalms of the Bible; they are the gospel songs of God which have been given to you and to me for this purpose.

Let’s do so, shall we? Turn to 99C in the *Book of Psalms for Singing*. The selection begins, “The Lord is king indeed, let people’s quail and fear. He sits above the cherubim, let earth be moved.” Let’s sing the psalms of the Old Testament; they are the gospel songs of the Bible. Let’s stand and sing.