

We can think about what it means to worship you today as we think about singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and how we may do that to your glory and honor. I pray that you bless this time in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you remember, well I'm going to do the review first and then I'll touch on that. In review, I just want to catch us all up and have our minds thinking as we look at what it means to worship God publicly in corporate worship. We said that corporate worship was the gathering of the body of Christ, the church, to worship and honor God, glorifying and enjoying Him with reverence, devotion, adoration, and praise with thanksgiving on the Lord's Day.

We also say that God is the object of our worship. So we talked about who God was. He is holy, holy, holy. He is infinite. He is the triune God who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

We said we had to worship God through a mediator. Because of our sins, we needed Jesus Christ to be our mediator. We also need the help of the Holy Spirit so that we might worship him in spirit and in truth.

We talked about the regulative principle. Simply speaking, regulative principle means that we worship God the way he commands us to worship him in his word and not any devices of our own heart. So we worship him in truth. We said that God prescribes the proper and pleasing way to worship Him. He tells us, this pleases me. So that's how, that's why we worship the way we do.

Our next time, we talked about prayer. Prayer is an offering of our desires unto God in the name of Christ, by the help of His Spirit, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies. We also said prayer is a means of grace.

We talked about the prayers in our service. First we talked about the call to worship. That's not a prayer. It starts us off. God calls us to come meet with him in worship. That sets the tone. We're not coming to meet with God. God calls us to meet with him. That's huge. That's a huge difference. And so our response is prayer and praise. So that first prayer is the invocation. God help me come and worship your right. That is the invocation.

Pastoral prayer is our next prayer in the service. It is a prayer of confession of sin, thanksgiving for pardon, and then the intercession. The intercession consists of praying for our civil authorities, praying for Christian ministries and missions, praying for the salvation of all men, praying for the sanctification of the saints, and then praying for the afflicted.

We also are called to be a thankful people, so our next prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving. We do that after the offertory. As we contemplate God's temporal and spiritual blessings to us, we come to Him with thanks. And then the fourth prayer is a prayer of illumination. As we come before the reading and preaching of God's word, we are calling out and asking Christ to help us help the preacher to preach faithfully and truthfully Christ's words to us, and help us to hear it.

Then we end the service in a benediction. The benediction is God's blessing on his people as they leave worship.

Then last week we talked about the reading and hearing of God's word. Why should we read God's word? Well, according to catechism, it's because it makes the word effectual to salvation. The word is effectual to salvation. Both preaching and reading is for evangelism and for the building up of the saints. Shorter Catechism says the Word of God is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him. We also had talked before that worship is a conversation. God calls us, we respond in prayer and praise, and then we read God's Word and we have God's Word speak to us. So that's God responding back to us. We also said we see examples throughout the scriptures where God's people are reading God's word to the congregation in worship. So we do it because it is commanded and because we see it as an example.

And then we talked about how should the word be read. The larger catechism says we should read it with godly fear. or the confession says that, the larger catechism tells us what that means. But we're to read the word with godly fear. And we also talked about we need to read larger sections of it. You know, if you're in this church long enough, you will have had, and most of us have been here a pretty good while, you will have the word read to you throughout the whole scripture. Because we're starting in Genesis and we're reading straight through it. So we want larger sections so as we get a sense of the whole, the whole counsel of God. So we don't want just a snippet here and a thought there, we want a chunk. We also do that in our preaching. And so we're reading all the way through to get that sense of what God is telling His people throughout the whole Bible.

We also looked at where we see the apostolic church reading the Bible in corporate worship. And particularly, Terry Johnson points out that Paul in 1 Timothy 4.13 tells Timothy, until I come, devote yourself to public reading. Paul thought it was important enough to tell his protege that in your church's youth plant, be devoted to public reading. And we talked about who should read the word. Well, the word of God is authoritative. It is his word. It is powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. So therefore, the person reading the word to the congregation should be called and should be gifted in it. That's why we believe it should be an elder. That's the office of elder, particularly the teaching elder. We do make exceptions for those men training for the ministry, such as Hunter. But in general, it should be an elder reading the Word.

Okay, we talked about preaching and hearing last week. Again, We have examples of preaching from John the Baptist and Jesus and Paul and the disciples. One of the more interesting passages was in Acts 6 when they called the disciples, I mean called to have an election of deacons because they said, we should not neglect the preaching of the word in prayer.

So the elders said, the apostles said, we need to be preaching. It's so important that we need to call another office to help us with the other ministry. So the preaching is that important. Again, we see Paul commanding Timothy to preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.

Larger catechism. Again, we see that in preaching of the word, we're seeing evangelism and sanctification. Preaching is the primary means for gathering and perfecting the elect where Christ reigns, restrains, and defends his people.

Zach Bird had a great definition of preaching. He said, preaching is an act of the exalted Christ through his commissioned officers, by his Spirit, as a means of grace communicated to his particular people. The preacher must depend on Christ and the Holy Spirit because he, when handling the word accurately, is preaching the very words of Christ. The very words of Christ are coming to us through the preaching of the Word.

We also talked about how true preaching is expository. That means we're having the words, the passage of Scripture explained. What does this mean? What is the sense of it? How does this play out? What did Paul mean in Philippians? Or Peter mean in 1 Peter? What was he mean when he wrote that? And then application. How does that apply to us today? How does that apply to you and me? So preaching should be expository with application.

Then we talked about that we need to hear. And the main point is we need to have preparation and prayer. And we need to attend upon it with diligence. And that's hard for us, particularly in our generation. We don't have as much discipline in our thoughts, as I think older generations did. That cell phone I carry around with me makes me think and snap, just little paragraphs and snaps. And we get these 30-second commercials, and so our minds are just going like this. We need to be diligent. We need to prepare with prayer so that we might receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind. We ought to meditate on it and confer with it, hide it in our hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in our lives.

We talked about the preaching and hearing of God's Word. Today we're going to talk about singing. And I want to remind us of, in the Confession, chapter 1, We've been talking about elements of worship. Singing is another element of worship. But we talked about circumstances. Let me see if I can find back where I had it. The circumstances are how do we play out some things that aren't specific. There's a lot more vagueness in seeing than in preaching and praying, okay? So we're gonna be talking about some circumstances, but how do we handle circumstances? They are to be ordered by the light of nature with Christian prudence according to the general rules of the word. So that takes wisdom. We need to remember who we are approaching, that our God is a consuming fire, we're to come before him in reverence and all, that is how we come with our singing, with reverence and all. But we have freedom, there is some freedom there too, but it is all has to be bound within that framework.

I'm really, Outlining basically Jonathan Landry Cruz's chapter on singing it was really good So I'm gonna be quoting him a lot probably too much, but he says it better than I can He opens up the chapter talking about that we as an Americans no longer sing as a community He said there was a time not too long ago in the history of our culture when it would be perfectly commonplace to sing and at parties, neighborhood gatherings, or with a few friends around the table after dinner. But in the past several decades, this practice has receded into obscurity, that it has almost become extinct. Singing has been regulated to the safe and solitary confines of the shower or the car on the daily commute.

" You know, he talks about that, you know, You know, we might sing at the Star Spangled Banner at a sporting event, or like at the football game last week, they sang Garth Brooks' I Have Friends in Low Places, you know, to entertain us in these five, ten minute timeouts they have. But, or at concerts, you go to a concert in a band you saw when you were 15 and you thought it was great and you still remember the words, and you're singing together with everybody else your age. We do that, but nobody's really hearing us. We're all just kind of, but we don't sing together anymore.

That's unusual. So that makes our singing in public worship seem strange to people that haven't grown up, that aren't used to it.

Journalist Karen Lowe says, the reason we no longer sing together are legion. We're insecure about our voices. We don't know the words. We resent being forced into an activity together. We feel uncool. And since we're out of practice as a society, the person who dares to begin a song risks having no one join her. Cruz says, this means that to our culture, unabashed communal singing is perhaps the most surprising aspect of Christian worship. There's nothing quite like it. A place where people willingly sing together, even if their voices aren't that great.

I can't carry a tune. In fact, I have to turn away from Vicki so I don't annoy her. I take a step away. Well, okay. Okay. I don't want to mess her up. But God tells us to bring a joyful noise. We're commanded to sing, whether we can sing or not. And so, we are all to bring praise to God, even if our voices aren't that great.

The church, we, as Second Presbyterians, has always been a church known that we sing. we've always had good singing, because we believe that it's right to sing communally, congregationally. And there are many churches you'll attend where hardly anybody sings. I know if you've not been to other churches, you've been there. Nobody except for maybe the choir, or in today's age, the worship band. And especially men are guilty of this. Men think it's undignified for men to sing in public, I think. Or at least of men of some age.

So while we may do it here, why do we do it here? And what are we singing? You know, I think, you know, A lot of the modern church worship is very music-centric. They've put music and song above the preaching. We see that because they put the stage out there, and they have worship leaders, which I think is a bad term. I don't think that's right. And they have a band, but their people aren't singing. They're watching people sing. They may sing along, some people, but you can't hear everybody. you're hearing this loud music like at a concert. Because we're leaving the singing up to professionals. A lot of the, I mean, sometimes it's literally professionals that are non-believers, and they bring them in to play music for them and sing. Because the excuse is we want to do everything well, perfectly, and bring excellence. That's not what God's calling for. He's calling for his people to sing.

So why do we sing at worship? Well, first of all, we do it because God commands us. Cruz says, he goes on to say, God has created us to be a society of song. So we need to know what we're doing when we sing on Sundays. We need to learn what is happening when we worship through song. It's not as simplistic as our culture would make it. That is, done for entertainment or out of national gusto. Rather, God has gifted us with song that we might have a fitting way to praise Him for His works. Pray to Him with our deepest needs and proclaim to one another the sanctifying truth of the gospel. Did you hear that? It's a fitting way to praise Him. We're not just intellectual beings. We're people with emotions, and there's something about singing that gets the whole man involved. We need to do it mentally, with our mind. We can't sing emptily, but we bring up our emotion, our passions, in a fitting way to praise him for his work. for Christ's work to redeem us.

Singing is a prayer. It's a way to pray to Him with our deepest needs, and we also are singing to one another, proclaiming to one another the sanctifying truths of the gospel. Those are things we do in worship.

So let's look at a few scriptures where we see God commanding us. If we're going to do it according to the scriptures, we need to see where God commands us.

We see in Psalm 98 1, O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. Isaiah 42.10, sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth. You who go down to the sea and all who fills it, the coastlines and their inhabitants. These are commands.

Revelation 5.9-10, and they sang a new song, saying, worthy are you to take up the scroll and open its seals. For you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God. from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priest of our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

2 Chronicles 16-23, sing to the Lord all the earth, tell of his salvation from day to day.

In 1 Corinthians 14-15, what am I to do? I will pray with my spirit and I will pray with my mind also. I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.

Shakespeare's Hamlet lamented, my words go up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go. Can you relate to that? I can. I can sit here and sing him I know the words to, and I'm just going along, my mind's thinking about what I have to do between church and Sunday, and going home, or after church, what do I got going on?

We need to be engaged mentally with what we're singing. We need to be thoughtful.

Two passages that tell us what to sing, Ephesians 5, I'm going to read 15 through 21. Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but wise, making the best use of time because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another. in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Colossians 3.16 says, We're to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

The Confession, chapter 21-5, along with reading the scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and hearing and obedience, understand, we're to sing Psalms with the grace in our heart as part of worship.

Terry Johnson says, the Word of God is not only to be read, preached, and prayed, it is also to be sung. Congregations are to sing, and the Bible is to supply the content for their praise. So we are not only to read and preach, but we're to sing God's Word, and the Word should be the content. The Bible supplies the content.

Cruz says, first we must recognize that all our singing is rooted in the work of our Savior, Jesus Christ. If we do not understand this, we have failed to offer up acceptable worship to God in the area of song. Worshipful singing is not constituted by any emotional thrill we might get from the music, but rather it comes from understanding why God is worthy of our song. and he is worthy because of the redemption we have through Jesus Christ. We sing because Christ saved us from our sins and we are thankful.

Okay, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. There is some debate about what that means. Paul Jones says, these passages direct us to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, or odes. Some argue that the three designations are simply three interchangeable words for canonical psalms. Pointing out the Septuagint uses all three words in psalm subtitles, making them terms with which Paul and believers of his day would have been familiar.

So what he's saying is these words, some people say these words are just different words, ways to address the Psalms in the Bible, the book of Psalms, and that that's all we should be singing. Exclusive psalmity. There's a good argument for that. We know that those are to be sung. That's a given.

On the other hand, Wesley Eisenberg writes, the very use of the diverse terminology such as this suggests that the early church encouraged a creative variety of musical and poetical expressions in its corporate worship. Had the church sought to discourage such expression, the variety of terms would eventually have given way to a single term, by which we would now be able to define and to delimit the hymn form.

So he's saying because it's three different words, terms, and it has been used over and over again, then that shows that there's a bigger variety than just the canonical Psalms. The other arguments for this, I'm arguing for hymnody because the argument for psalms is easy to make. Nobody argues that we shouldn't be singing psalms. The question is, where does hymns come in?

Well, the other arguments for that would be that... I lost my place. would be that in Psalms and Ephesians and Colossians, they're speaking of different types of praise, acknowledging the canticles. Canticles are the different songs in the Bible. Think of Moses and Miriam after the Red Sea. Think of the Magnificant with Mary. David in 2 Samuel. You have Zechariah's song. after the birth of John. We see these other songs. So these aren't Psalms. So we have a variety of, they're not considered psalms, they're canticles, they're other things, another type of psalm.

You also find in the different hymn fragments and other poetic languages in some of the epistles and other books of the New Testament where And from the literary structure, they appear to have been parts of songs or hymns of praise. And I've got a list of different places, John 1, 1 through 5. John 1, 9-11, Romans 10, 9-13, 1 Corinthians 12, 3, Ephesians 5, 14, Philippians 2, 6-11, and several other places if y'all want to have those references to look up where we see him like language.

We also have the doxologies and benedictions in our Bible that we can sing. So the definition, well, let me go on. Another argument is that without hymns, that while Psalms speak of Christ, we would not be able to praise Christ

for his redeeming work, because Christ was what came after the Psalms were written. So they only are looking forward, and now we're looking back. So the hymns help us to sing praises looking back at Christ.

And then there's some historical evidence looking at it from Pliny's report. of the Bithynian church Christians, they said that it was in worship that the decisive step was made of setting the exalted Christ on a level with God as the recipient of the church's praise. Hymnology and Christology thus merged in the worship of one God, soon to be hailed after the New Testament canon as worth of hymns as to God.

So in other words, The early church were singing hymns of praise to Christ. And that's an example that even the early church were singing hymns and not just the canonical Psalms.

So, Paul Jones, I read an article by him, he says, Psalms are not only the appropriate worship songs of the people of God. From the New Testament examples, worship should also include our Christian response to the finished work of Calvary. what could be called a Christian interpretation of the Psalms through hymns, canticles, biblical songs, and present-day hymns.

According to Hughes Oliphant Old, the doxology of the earliest Christians kept psalmody and hymnody in a dynamic balance. Without Christian hymns, our praise of God through psalms would be rich, but it would be missing our acknowledgment of the gratitude for the manner in which Christ has redeemed us and fulfilled that which the Old Testament promised.

We believe that the triune God should be worshipped through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. A spiritual song Most of my reading didn't really address that, but I've looked it up. A spiritual song is more of a personal devotion to Christ, where you're singing more of more love to Christ from a personal experience. And that's about the best I can do with what that means. It comes as more of a personal praise instead of corporate.

Paul Jones has a good definition of a hymn. Great hymns serve as praise, prayer, and proclamation in the context of worship. They say something we still need to hear, something we must believe, sing, and share. They often paraphrase a psalm, distill the teaching of a specific scriptural passage, or relate a doctrine or other spiritual truth by drawing on several biblical texts.

Hymns are not emotionless. They make demands on the whole person, on the heart, soul, and mind, and they have special power to communicate the spiritual truth and encouragement, particularly through the association of a fitting tune.

I could easily be convinced of exclusive psalmody, but I sure would hate to lose the hymns. And I think they make a case, there is historical argument for it. The fact that we don't have Christian hymns, we can come to the Psalms and we can... Isaac Watts did an amazing job of rewriting the hymns, putting Christ in it. Those aren't canonical hymns, songs. Those are hymns based on Scripture. And Paul Jones here is saying that a hymn needs to be based on the Word. It's explaining doctrine. It's thoroughly biblically and doctrinally sound.

But he also talks it needs to be a fitting tune. And that's something not all our hymns have, or psalms. The best hymns have a fitting tune to get the right mood. I think Joy to the World is probably one of the best hymns out there because it is joyful. When you sing it, you feel joyful.

I can remember singing a psalm. It was an imprecatory psalm to an upbeat tune. I'm going, I just don't know about singing happily about dashing children against the rocks. You know, it wasn't fitting. When we're saying strict and smitten and afflicted, it's got to have that sense of earnestness, that sense that the mood has to be right, and the tune fits it. You know, I think it's important that they meet, and we sing hymns all the time that doesn't quite meet that qualification, but that's for another day to improve on. There's several things we're doing in our songs, and I'm running out of time.

Praise. First thing we do is we're praising God. Hughes, often old, defines praise as the sense of awe and wonder we have when we enter the presence of God. When the Israelites went into the temple, they sang praises as they entered. When they left the temple, they sang praises as they left. We are to praise our God. It is right to praise God because that's expressing our sense of awe and reverence at being in the presence of God. that's as we leave. We sense the awe and presence of God's Word being applied to us and given to us, having met with Him in worship.

Also, singing of prayers. John Calvin wrote, as a public prayers There are two kinds. One consists of simply speech, the other of song. Prayers are singing, our songs are prayers. Cruz says, insofar as a prayer is any type of direct address to God, corporate singing and worship falls under this category. Why is this important? Life is difficult and messy. You know, the Psalter gives us a proper balance of emotive music, songs of praise as well as lament, songs of adoration as well as confession. It helps us to express emotionally what we're going through in our life. Some of our favorite hymns were written out of tragedy, Abide With Me, by Henry F. Light, due to failing health, and Horatio Spafford wrote, It Is Well With My Soul. How can we express the depths of our need if we don't have song? Cruz says, this reminds us that when we sing in corporate worship, it's part of the covenant conversation in which we speak back to God. And we know that when we call out to him, whether speaking or singing, he hears us for the sake of Christ. Christ is the mediator who makes our cares his own. and brings him to the throne of the Heavenly Father. Our prayers become his. Our requests and petitions are made by him. As our great high priest, he sings our humble song into the Father's ear, and therefore we can know that we are heard.

So, praise, prayer, proclamation. Seeing is primarily speaking to God. However, Ephesians and Colossians make it plain that we are speaking to and encouraging and instructing one another. We are preaching to one another. and hymns and psalms as we sing. Seeing is a means by which faith in the gospel is planted and cultivated in our heart.

Cruz says, congregational singing is a sort of communal preaching. In Colossians, Paul said, singing allows the words of Christ to dwell in us. the gospel to dwell in us. That's why being seen as the congregation singing together is important because we're singing to one another.

If you've ever been to the Men's Rally and had a church full of men sing or at Presbytery, it is all inspiring. It is encouraging. At GA, I think it was at Richmond, because I think that's the only one that had a simple worship service, singing service, that I've been to. Over 3,000 Christians in there, boys and men and women, boys and girls,

singing praises to God. And you weren't being overrun with the instruments as we often are there. It was incredibly encouraging spiritually. I know you were there, weren't you? No, you weren't. It was very humbling to hear the God's people singing together.

And even in our little place, to have us singing together. Psalm 149-1 says, praise the Lord, sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise in the assembly of the saints. Psalm 22, I will tell of your name to my brothers in the midst of the congregation, I will praise you. We are to sing out loud in the congregation, in the assembly.

read this quote by Cruz. This means that when we sing, we are not just communicating to God or even communicating with one another, though we are certainly doing those things, but singing is a responsibility, a duty. When we sing God's word, we ought to realize that God is using this moment to manifest his glory and splendor and indeed his gospel to those who are present.

The fifth and last thing we do, we're expressing our love, awe, and joy to God and to one another. So Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, the heart sings because it's overflowing with Christ. When we're overflowing with the love of the Lord Jesus Christ to us, does that not make you want to sing? And we sing the words that come to us, the praises of God. from our hymns, our psalms.

As we, if our hearts are overflowing with Christ, we must have the words of Christ ritually dwell in us. Therefore, our songs must be but thoroughly filled with God's word, and they must be word-centered.

Well, I'm way out of time, and I think I've gotten through most all of it. We're to sing because we love the Lord Jesus Christ. We're to sing because we want to encourage one another. And we're to sing God's words back to Him. We're to sing based on what He's told us, because we want to sing in spirit and truth.

Well, let's pray. Our Father, we do thank You that You give us song. that you care about not just our intellect, but our heart. You care not just about me as an individual, you want us, you want your church to praise you. And you want for us to encourage the church as a whole. Lord God, I pray that you'd meet with us this morning and you would bless us in word and in song. In Jesus' name, amen.