

Plenty to sing about!

Out of all the religious peoples of the world (and all the non-religious people, too), Christians are the ones who do the most singing - because **Christians have the most to sing about!**

- Did you know that the words *sing, sings, singing, sang and sung* occur over 170 times in the Bible; and the words *song and songs* occur a further 116 times, making almost 300 references to singing altogether?

In our recent Sunday evening studies in the Old Testament book of Zephaniah, we were reminded of some of the reasons for our singing.

Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your punishment; he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

[Zephaniah 3.14-17]

We sing for joy because **God has taken away the punishment our sins deserved and with it our fear** of condemnation, death and damnation. Our greatest enemy of all – the prospect of spending eternity in hell, irreversibly separated from God – has been turned back. It's no longer something any of us need fear once we have embraced God's Saviour and salvation (1 John 4.18).

When John the Baptist first set eyes on Jesus, he cried out (John 1.29), "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" Jesus himself is the sacrifice that God has provided for the removal of our sin and all the punishment it deserves. In his own body, Jesus bore full responsibility for our sins and suffered the punishment they deserved (1 Peter 2.24; 3.18). He didn't simply carry our sins to the cross and leave them there; he carried the can for them. He answered up for them in our place, as our representative; and he died the death sentence our sins had earned us, in our place, as our substitute.

This fact is underlined time and time again in the New Testament, because it is the very foundation on which God's provision of salvation for us rests

(Heb 9.28; 10.4,11-14; 1 John 3.5). And it also provides the reason for our greatest joy! *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*, Paul tells us in Romans 8.1.

But the Zephaniah passage reminds us too, that we sing for joy because **God is with us as our source of daily strength and eternal security**. Hands hanging limp are a sign of weakness. It's the way I often feel when I'm playing tennis! I know what shots I want to play, but when I miss them, my shoulders droop and my hands hang limply at my side in frustration and annoyance! But when God is with us, *he turns our weaknesses into his opportunities*, as the song puts it.

Though we are weak, his grace is everything we need. We're made of clay, but this treasure is within. He turns our weaknesses into his opportunities, so that all the glory goes to him.

["Rejoice, rejoice, Christ is in you" by G Kendrick]

"*When I am weak, then I am strong*," Paul writes in 2 Cor 12.10,9; for Jesus had assured him, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*." What an encouragement those words are to us! Paradoxically, when we're feeling at our weakest, that's when we're at our strongest - because it's when we feel at our weakest that we most fully rely on the Lord, rather than on our own strength, ideas, insights, and expertise.

But, amazingly, whilst we are singing for joy down here on earth, **God is singing for joy over us in heaven**, Zephaniah 3.17 tells us!

- God sings for joy over his people because *he takes great delight in us*. He has made us in his image; we bear his very own likeness (Gen 1.26-27). So, when God looks at us, it's as if he is looking at himself in a mirror; and he likes what he sees! (Gen 1.31; Prov 8.30-31) - especially when we are reflecting the glory of his own character back to him (Prov 11.20; 12.22; Ps 147.11). No one has done that better than Jesus, of course, which is why the Father took such delight in his Son during his days on earth (Mat 12.18, quoting Is 42.1). In the two parables of Luke 15.1-10, about a lost sheep and a lost coin, Jesus reveals that the whole of heaven erupts with joy over every sinner who is found by God's Saviour. God sings for all he's worth every time a human being is rescued, to spend eternity with him!

"I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honour in every land where they were put to shame ... I will bring you home!" says the LORD.
[Zephaniah 3.19-20]

So, given the fact that we have so much to sing about as Christians, it's appropriate that *singing* is the theme running throughout this newsletter.

Prom Praise at The Sage

On **Saturday 8th November**, we have a unique opportunity to sing God's praises at The Sage Gateshead when the *All Souls Orchestra* from London brings *Prom Praise* to the Northeast. As I write, there are still a few tickets left for the evening performance. Let me know if you would like me to get you some at a 10% discount!

We are looking forward to welcoming some members of the orchestra to our morning service on **9th November**, which is **Remembrance Sunday**. The service will be starting 15 minutes earlier than normal, at **10.45am**, to enable us to observe two minutes of silence at 11.00am in common with many other citizens of our nation. Please use the publicity we have produced to invite friends, neighbours and other contacts to the service. We will be serving lunch afterwards, so let Elma Hunt know if you are planning to stay for it so we know how many we should cater for.

The Big Sing

Later on in the month, there will be another opportunity to fill our lungs to sing God's praises. On **Sunday evening 23rd November**, we are hosting *The Big Sing*, an event being organised by the Northern Baptist Association. A dozen or so songs and hymns will be recorded for use by smaller churches without musical resources of their own. I experienced singing along to such recordings at Hamsterley Baptist Church during my time working with the NBA. When the congregation numbers only a handful, it's uplifting to sing God's praises with hundreds of other people, even though they are only on a CD! So, please make a special effort to attend this special event, to praise our Lord Jesus Christ and be of service to his people in the smaller Baptist Churches of the Northeast.

Christmas Carol singing

Looking ahead to next month, there will be a further opportunity to sing God's praises in a special way. We are delighted that the Gateshead Music Service's Schools' Swing Band, *Paraffernalia*, have agreed to lead us in an evening of *Christmas Music and Carols* on **Thursday evening, 4th December**, from **8.00-9.30pm** (including refreshments).



Posters and flyers for the event are now available so that we can publicise the special night amongst friends, neighbours and other contacts. We will be selling tickets for the event (£3 for adults and £1 for under 16s) to help cover costs. Please encourage as many people as possible to attend, to make it a night to remember – and a night that will count for all of eternity!

We are hoping to put together a small *singing group* for our Church *Carol Service* on **Sunday evening 21st December**. Please see Ray Hill if you would like to be a part of it.

We are also looking at the possibility of singing *carols in the town centre*, one Saturday morning in the run up to Christmas, as we have done in previous years. Please let me know if you are interested in taking part.

Dates for the Diary

Here is a note of some other special events taking place at the church over the next few weeks.

- **Wednesday 26th November: Church Members' Half-Annual General Meeting, 7.30pm**
- **Saturday evening 6th December: presentation by Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 7.00-9.00pm**
- **Sunday morning 21st December: All-age Christmas service, 11.00am-12 noon.**

David Hunt