

Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord! Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

I don't think it will come as a big surprise to anyone, but I like music. It has always been a key part of my life. I have sung in church choirs all my life, beginning with Junior Choir when I was 5 years old. While I haven't really played in years, I do play the trombone, and at one time in high school I was in 3 concert bands, a brass quintet and a German Oom-pah band that performed regularly during Oktoberfest in my home town of Kitchener, ON—the Canadian home of Oktoberfest.

I've often felt that I could live without a television, but I would not want to give up my music. Can you imagine life without music? That is especially true for us as the people of God. Music has always been the response of God's faithful people to His goodness. After their deliverance from Egypt, through the Red Sea, we are told: ***Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.*** (Exodus 15:1 - ESV) After the Exile, at the dedication of the rebuilt wall around Jerusalem, the people ***sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.*** (Nehemiah 12:27 - ESV) When they were in prison in Philippi for preaching the Gospel, we hear that ***About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,*** (Acts 16:25 - ESV) James tells us: ***Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.*** (James 5:13 - ESV) And when John sees the glory of heaven in the Revelation made known to him, he notes: ***and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.*** (Revelation 14:3 - ESV)

As we continue our rejoicing in this Easter season, we come to this day that was traditionally known as Cantate Sunday, or "Singing Sunday". We rejoice with all the saints of old that we have a reason for singing, as we join the psalmist in declaring: ***Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.*** Sing that new, old song, the song the church has always sung! Sing the praises of Him who died and rose again for you! Sing with great joy, for God, in His grace and mercy has given you forgiveness, life and salvation in His Son!

When the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle was asked what he thought of music, he replied, ***"Jupiter does not sing, neither does he play the harp."*** He seems to infer that music is unbecoming to deity and therefore also unprofitable to humanity. The true God, on the other hand, before whom the morning stars sang together at the creation and around whose throne the cherubim and seraphim sing their glory songs, is a lover of music. I found 133 verses that speak of singing. Many more verses speak of music and song. Martin Luther said: ***"Music is one of the fairest and most glorious gifts of God, to which Satan is a bitter enemy, for it removes from the heart the weight of sorrow and the fascination of evil thoughts. It is a kind and gentle sort of discipline; it refines the passions and improves the understanding. Those who love music are gentle and honest in their tempers. I always loved music and would not for a great matter be without the little skill I possess in the art."***

Music is an attempt to express emotions that are beyond speech. And when we realize the reasons we have for singing, then we know that even music isn't capable of expressing the deep, abiding joy; the great and glorious hope; the all-encompassing peace that fills the hearts of those who know the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ through faith. Our reason for singing is found in God's great and glorious work for our salvation. We sing a new song, because of the wonderful blessings of the Lord, which are new every morning. We sing a new song because of the wonderful new life we have through Jesus Christ. Yet we are singing the same song of joy and praise that has been sung by God's people in every age.

So, do you feel like singing? People don't tend to feel like singing when they are sad and defeated, although there are songs of lament, even as there are songs of joy. The laments seek to find the means of expressing the sorrow and anguish of the human heart, which is why so many pop songs deal with lost love and heartbreak. In fact, the only song that we could come up with on our own would be a song of lament. The reality of our sinful lives is one of sorrow and heartache. Listen to the news. You won't hear too many things that make you want to sing. Look at the needs of so many around us. It's hard to think of singing. We know of those who have lost loved ones in death, and while there is comfort for the Christian in knowing that a dear saint is at home with the Lord, so many see little reason for joyous song. There are those struggles and cares that we are dealing with at work, at home, in our relationships and even in the church. Pile on top of that all the bills that have to be paid, and all the things that we never ever seem to have time to do that just have to be done, and it is no wonder that we just don't feel like singing.

When the people of Israel were captives in Babylon, they had little reason for joy. In fact, one of the psalmists writes: ***By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?*** (Psalm 137:1-4 - ESV) We may not think of ourselves as being in exile, but we see the things that are wrong in our lives, and we don't feel like singing. We know that our hearts are not pure and holy as God demands. We are captives—captives to our own sinfulness, shown by the things we do that hurt and deny our heavenly Father and His will for us. Our slavery to sin is shown with every loveless act against our neighbour. We are captives to sin who must face the consequences of our sinfulness—and we don't feel like singing.

But there is a reason for singing—and it is found in the great love of our God for us: that love that is made known to us in His precious gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Our text today may well be one of the psalms that was written after the captivity in Babylon. The people who were defeated by their enemies, carted away into exile and slavery, left without a reason for rejoicing now suddenly have that reason. The Lord has delivered them! The Lord has made known His salvation as He has set His people free from their enemies. The Lord has come as mighty judge and has vindicated His people.

The deliverance of the people of Israel from their Babylonian captivity is just a small foreshadowing of the greater victory that the Lord has won for His people. We are drawn to the Saviour on the cross, and remember that Jesus loved us and gave His holy life as the payment for all our sinfulness. We are drawn right back to that empty tomb, and the victory over death and the grave that is ours in the resurrected Lord. Jesus gave His holy, sinless life for us to make things right with God for us, so that we may look forward in joy to that heavenly joy, to that time when God ***will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.***

(Revelation 21:4 - ESV)

You and I have that hope through faith and so we sing. We sing of the great love of God. We sing of the forgiveness that we have in Christ. We sing of the hope and life that wait for us in heaven's glory. We sing, because even in the midst of life's problems and cares, we have a loving Lord who is with us to see us through. You might be surprised to learn that many of the best loved and enduring hymns were written in the midst of some of life's darkest days. Yes, we sing, because God has made known His salvation. He has revealed His glory to us. He has ransomed and redeemed us.

So sing that new, old song. It is the song that God's people have always sung—the song of a Saviour greater than our sin; a Saviour greater than the devil and hell and death itself. The psalmist tells us: ***Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord! Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.*** Raise your voice in the praise of God. Yes, we want to give Him our very best, but if your best is a bit off-key, don't worry. Just sing. Sing the praise of Him who loved you and died for you. Sing of the Saviour who gives you life through His life. Sing of the Lord who walks with you and has given you all things. Sing as the people of God have always sung, rejoicing in all that is ours through Jesus Christ, our Saviour! Amen.