

PSALMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Leader's Guide, Lesson Twelve

THE PSALMS IN THE CHURCH

Christ Sings with Us

Lesson at a glance

This is the capstone, and it is the only lesson in the series that does not take a single psalm as its text. Its anchor is Hebrews 2:11 to 12, where the writer quotes Psalm 22:22 and puts the words in the mouth of Jesus: "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." That sentence turns the whole study around. For eleven weeks the class has watched the apostles find Christ in the Psalms. Now they find Christ standing in their own assembly, not as the audience of the singing only but as the one leading it, and not ashamed to call them brothers. From there the lesson works out through the rest of what the New Testament says about the church and song: the upper room, the Philippian jail, James on gladness, the twin passages in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 on singing that teaches and admonishes, the continual sacrifice of praise in Hebrews 13, and Paul's insistence in 1 Corinthians 14 that the mind be engaged. It handles a cappella singing positively, as what the New Testament actually names and what the churches did, and then closes by gathering up all thirteen psalms of the study and looking forward to Psalm 22:27 to 31 and Revelation 5:9 to 13. A final section gives the class five practical habits for keeping the Psalms after the study ends. Your job this hour is partly to teach and largely to send people out well.

Goals for this session

First, that every person would see from Hebrews 2:11 to 12 that the risen Christ leads the praise of His people from inside the congregation, and would never again sing on Sunday as though He were somewhere else.

Second, that the class would learn from Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 that congregational singing comes from the heart, carries the word of Christ, and teaches and admonishes the person standing next to them, so that they begin paying attention to what our songs actually say.

Third, that the class would see, calmly and from the text itself, that the music the New Testament names for the church is singing, and would hold that conviction gladly and without a chip on the shoulder.

Fourth, that the class would leave with a specific, written plan for reading, praying, and singing the Psalms after this study ends, and with their eyes on the worship of Psalm 22:27 to 31 that is still being completed.

Preparing to lead

Read Hebrews 2 in full, out loud, earlier in the week, and then go back and read Psalm 22 all the way through in one sitting. The class studied that psalm in Lesson Four, but this lesson stands on verse 22 and on verses 27 to 31, and you should have the whole shape of the psalm in your head before you teach the last hour of the series.

Read every passage in the student list in one sitting: Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26, Acts 16:22 to 34, Romans 15:9, 1 Corinthians 14:15 and 14:26 and 14:40, Ephesians 5:18 to 21, Colossians 3:16 to 17, Hebrews 13:15 to 16, James 5:13, and Hebrews 2:11 to 12. Reading them together, at one go, is the single most persuasive thing you can do in preparation, and it is exactly what question 10 asks the class to do.

Then put the lesson down and pray over your class by name. This is the last hour you will have with them on this subject. Ask yourself who in the room is discouraged, who has drifted, who has never obeyed the gospel, and who is going to walk out on Sunday and never open the Psalter again unless somebody helps them build a habit this week. Plan your last ten minutes with those four people in mind. Plan also to sing in class; a lesson about singing that contains no singing will teach the opposite of what it says.

Sensitive topics in this lesson

Instrumental music. This is the obvious one, and the tone you take will be remembered longer than anything you say. Do not name groups, do not argue with people who are not in the room, and do not let the hour turn into a debate. Teach positively: here is what the New Testament says, here is the instrument it names, here is what the churches did for centuries, and here is why what Christ gave is enough. Some in your class will have family who worship with instruments, and some will have visited such a service last month at a wedding or a funeral. A class taught gently will be far kinder in those conversations than a class taught hotly. If someone raises Revelation 5:8, where the elders hold harps, answer it plainly and briefly: Revelation is a book of visions, and the same scene contains golden bowls of incense and a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, with an altar close by in the visions that follow. Nobody proposes that we burn incense on the strength of it. Visions in that book are not instructions to the assembly; the letters to the churches are. If someone raises Psalm 150, use the answer the lesson gives, from Hebrews 7:12, 8:13, and 10:9, and make the point about the covenant change rather than about anybody's church.

People who cannot sing, or think they cannot. There are people in every congregation who have been told at some point in their lives that they have a bad voice, and they have not sung above a whisper since. This lesson is a gift to them if you handle it right. Ephesians 5:19 names the heart as the instrument, not the larynx. Say that out loud. God is not auditioning anyone.

Grief, illness, and loneliness. The Philippian jail, the laments in the "keeping the Psalms" section, and Psalm 22 itself will find people who are in hard places right now. Say clearly, more than once, that

roughly a third of the Psalter is complaint and that God put it there deliberately, so that His people would have words when they had none of their own. If someone in the room has recently buried a spouse or received a diagnosis, do not single them out, but do make sure Psalm 13 and Psalm 88 get read aloud.

People who have drifted, and people who have never been baptized. Because this is the last session, some will quietly feel that a door is closing. Do not stage an emotional appeal, and do not put anyone on the spot in front of the class. Do say, near the end and without drama, that if anyone has never been buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life, or has drifted away and wants to come back, you or one of the elders would count it a privilege to sit down with them this week. Then be genuinely available afterward, and do not leave the room quickly.

Songs whose words are not true. Question 7 and the Optional Application invite the class to examine the doctrine in familiar hymns. This can bruise people, because a song someone has loved since childhood may turn out to teach something Scripture does not. Handle it with real affection. The goal is not to build a class of critics; it is to raise people who listen to what they are singing. Praise the many songs that are simply Scripture set to music before you examine any that are not.

Suggested 60- to 75-minute schedule

Five minutes: welcome. Say plainly that this is the last session and that the last ten minutes will be given to looking back over the whole study.

Five minutes: open in prayer. Read Hebrews 2:10 to 13 aloud first, and let the class sit with verse 12 before you pray.

Five minutes: warm-up. Ask each person to name a favorite congregational song and say in one sentence why, and write the titles where everyone can see them.

Thirty-five to forty minutes: discussion. Choose six or seven questions in advance. Protect questions 2, 6, 10, 11, and 12.

Five to ten minutes: "Your response" reflection, and question 13, where each person writes down a specific plan for keeping the Psalms.

Five minutes: sing one of the songs from the warm-up list, then closing prayer.

Discussion priorities

Make sure these are among the questions you discuss: 2 (Hebrews 2:10 to 13 and Christ singing in the midst of the congregation), 6 (Ephesians 5:19 beside Colossians 3:16), 10 (the music the New Testament names), 11 (looking back over the thirteen psalms), and 12 (Psalm 22:27 to 31 with Revelation 5:9 to 13). If the hour runs short, shorten 8 and 9 rather than 11 and 12; the class needs the look back and the look forward more than it needs another paragraph of exposition. Question 13 must not be skipped,

even if you have to hold the class an extra three minutes, because it is the only thing in the lesson that has a chance of surviving the week.

Notes on key questions

Question 2. This is the heart of the hour. Hebrews 2:11 says that "he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source," and the Greek is literally "are all of one," with the noun left unstated; translations supply "source" or "origin" or "family." The point is shared humanity and shared sonship: He became one of us in order to make us His. That is why He is not ashamed to call us brothers. Then the writer proves it from Psalm 22:22 and places the words on Jesus' lips. Work through the pronouns out loud with the class: the "I" is Christ, "your name" is the Father's, "my brothers" is us. Two details are worth giving them. Our Old Testament reads "I will praise you," from the Hebrew; Hebrews follows the Greek Old Testament, "I will sing your praise," using *hymneo*, the same verb Matthew uses in 26:30. And the word rendered "congregation" is *ekklesia*, the ordinary New Testament word for church. The conclusion to press is the one they will remember: Christ is certainly the object of the church's praise, as Revelation 5 makes overwhelmingly clear, but Hebrews 2:12 says something more startling than that. He is in the middle of the assembly, praising the Father with His brothers and leading them in it. Let the class feel the difference between a Christ who receives our singing from a distance and a Christ who stands among us and sings. Question 3 belongs with this one and can be taken in the same breath. In Psalm 22:19 to 21 the sufferer is still in extremity, asking God not to be far off, asking to be delivered from the sword and the dog and the lion, and then the mood breaks at the end of verse 21: "You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen." The first thing he does after the rescue is not rest, not revenge, and not explanation. It is to tell his brothers about God's name in the assembly. Praise is the natural first act of a rescued person, and it is done in company. Show the class that Hebrews is not lifting a verse at random; it is quoting the hinge of the psalm, the exact place where the crucifixion account turns into the church.

Question 4. The Hallel is Psalms 113 to 118, sung at Passover, with 113 and 114 before the meal and 115 to 118 after it. That is the near certainty behind Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26, which means the last thing Jesus sang before Gethsemane included Psalm 118, studied in Lesson Nine. Read 118:22 to 27 aloud in class and let the room hear it as He would have sung it: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar," and "Save us, we pray, O LORD," which is the word the crowds had shouted at Him days before. This is a good moment simply to be quiet for a few seconds. Do not over-explain it.

Question 5. Acts 16:22 to 24 gives the setting: stripped, beaten with rods, many blows, thrown into the inner prison, feet fastened in the stocks. At midnight, in that condition, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. Luke's added clause is the one to press: "and the prisoners were listening to them." Singing carries over walls; other people always hear it. On part b, James 5:13 to 14 pairs three conditions with three responses: suffering with prayer, cheerfulness with singing praise, sickness with calling for the elders of the church. The verb in "let him sing praise" is *psallo*, the same word behind "making melody" in Ephesians 5:19. Two things to draw out. James assumes a Christian will have something to sing, which means he assumes the songs are already in them. And James treats gladness as

a thing that needs a response too, not just trouble; most of us have a plan for what to do when life goes badly and no plan at all for what to do when it goes well.

Question 6. Put the two verses on a board side by side. Identical or nearly so: singing, the three terms "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," the direction toward one another, the direction toward God, and the heart. Different: Ephesians grounds it in being filled with the Spirit and says "addressing one another"; Colossians grounds it in the word of Christ dwelling in you richly and says "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom," and adds thankfulness. The parallel between the two grounds is the doctrinal payoff of the question, and it should be handled carefully but confidently. Being filled with the Spirit and having the word of Christ dwell in you richly produce the same result because the Spirit works in the Christian today through the word He revealed. Ephesians 6:17 calls that word the sword of the Spirit. If someone in the class expects a direct, private communication from the Spirit apart from Scripture, this is the place to steer gently: the confirming, miraculous work of the Spirit belonged to the age when the word was still being delivered and confirmed (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3 to 4; 1 Corinthians 13:8 to 10), and what we have now is the completed word, which is exactly what Colossians 3:16 tells us to fill ourselves with. Do this without a lecture; the verse itself does most of the work. Question 7 follows directly. Teaching is instruction, putting truth into someone; admonishing is warning, setting a truth against something in the hearer that needs to change, and Colossians says our singing does both to one another. Ask the class to name a song that teaches (one that walks through the cross, or the resurrection, or the attributes of God) and a song that admonishes (one about counting the cost, or coming home, or the shortness of life). Many will realize for the first time that congregational singing is a teaching work of the church and not a warm-up for the sermon. Then take Colossians 3:17 as the governing verse, since it sets up the Study Skill: everything in word or deed is done in the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, on His authority. Let that sentence stand as the answer to how we decide what we do when we assemble, and resist the urge to expand it into a speech.

Question 8. Hebrews 13:15 names the sacrifice that remains after Christ has ended the sacrificial system: "a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." The phrase "fruit of lips" comes from the Greek Old Testament of Hosea 14:2, where the Hebrew has "bulls of our lips," a striking image either way, since the point is that words are the offering now. Two words carry the verse. "Through him" means our praise is offered through our High Priest, which ties this verse straight back to Hebrews 2:12. "Continually" means it is a life and not an hour. Verse 16 sets a second sacrifice beside the first, doing good and sharing what you have, and the reason they are joined is that God will not accept the song of a person whose hands are closed. Compare Psalm 50:14 and 50:23 and Psalm 69:30 to 31, and note that the class already met the Psalm 69 passage in Lesson Six. Question 9 goes with it. Paul's rule in 1 Corinthians 14:15 is that both praying and singing be done with the mind as well as the spirit. Set it in its chapter: 14:26 says that when the church comes together everything is to be done for building up, and 14:40 that all things be done decently and in order. Note honestly that the specific problem at Corinth was the misuse of miraculous gifts, which served to confirm the word while it was being delivered and have since ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8 to 10). The abiding principle outlasts the situation: worship must be intelligible, because unintelligible worship builds nobody up. For the practical half of the question, expect and encourage very ordinary answers, such as reading the words of

the third verse before singing it, putting the phone down, arriving in time to be settled, and learning what a word like "Ebenezer" or "diadem" actually means. Small things, but they are the whole question.

Question 10. Have the class build the list out loud: Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26, Acts 16:25, Romans 15:9, 1 Corinthians 14:15 and 14:26, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 2:12, Hebrews 13:15, James 5:13. In every one of them the music is singing, and in every one of them the people doing it are the Christians themselves. On part b, Ephesians 5:19 does name an instrument: "making melody to the Lord with your heart." The verb is *psallo*, which in older Greek meant to pluck a string, and Paul specifies what is plucked. Make the positive case and let it stand on its own feet: this is worship every member can offer, it costs nothing, it leaves no one in the audience, it carries words that teach, and it is what the churches did for centuries before instruments were introduced by human decision. Keep your tone the tone of a grateful servant rather than a prosecutor. If a class member has questions, answer them kindly and offer to keep talking after class; do not spend the last hour of a twelve-week study on a dispute.

Question 11. Do this out loud as a class and take your time. Expect and help them toward answers like these. Psalm 2: God's Anointed King, declared Son with power at the resurrection, reigning now. Psalm 8: the son of man crowned with glory and honor, and we see Jesus even though we do not yet see all things subjected. Psalm 16: the Holy One not abandoned to the grave or given over to corruption. Psalm 22: the crucified and vindicated King who turns and sings among His brothers. Psalm 40: the obedient Servant for whom a body was prepared. Psalm 69: the one consumed by zeal for God's house and covered by the reproaches of others. Psalm 95: the living voice of God saying "Today," and the real possibility of hardening and falling short. Psalm 110: the Priest-King seated at God's right hand after the order of Melchizedek. Psalm 118: the rejected stone that became the cornerstone. Psalms 45 and 102: the Son addressed as God, given an everlasting throne, and credited with laying the foundation of the earth. Psalms 34 and 41: the righteous man whose bones were not broken, and the friend who ate his bread and lifted his heel. Part b is the pastoral half of the question, and it is worth going around the room for it if there is time. It will also tell you what to teach next.

Question 12. Psalm 22:27 to 31 widens in every direction at once: to all the ends of the earth, to all the families of the nations, to the prosperous, to all who go down to the dust, to posterity, and to a people yet unborn. The final words are "that he has done it," which the class should hear beside John 19:30, "It is finished," as they did in Lesson Four. Revelation 5:9 to 13 gives three widening circles: the new song of the redeemed in verses 9 and 10, praising the Lamb because He was slain and by His blood ransomed people from every tribe and language and people and nation; then myriads of angels in verses 11 and 12; then every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea in verse 13. Put Psalm 22:22 beside Revelation 5:13 and let the class see the size of what has happened to that congregation. Then ask part c and make it personal: the growth of that assembly runs straight through this room, and it runs on because somebody came and told somebody else. This is the high point of the hour and the right place to end the teaching. Question 13, which follows in the last section, must not be answered in the abstract. Give the class ninety seconds of silence and have every person write down one habit, the days, and the time of day. Reading plans that work: five psalms a day for a month; one psalm a day for five months; or the psalm matching the day of the month plus thirty each time, which

also covers the book in a month. Say out loud that the laments are for use and not just for study. If your congregation has a way to follow up, name it before they leave.

About the Study Skills in this lesson

Two Study Skills close the series. Asking Where the Authority Comes From is the habit that makes a Christian answerable to Scripture rather than to preference. It is built on Colossians 3:17, and it names the three ordinary ways instruction reaches us: a command, an approved apostolic example, and a conclusion that cannot be avoided. Teach the two cautions as carefully as the skill itself. The question is asked of ourselves first, and the motive is a servant's gladness rather than a search for the minimum, which is why John 14:15 and 2 John 9 are cited. A class that learns this skill with a sour spirit has not learned it. The second skill, Praying a Psalm Back to God, is the most immediately usable thing in the whole twelve weeks. Demonstrate it in class rather than describing it; take Psalm 23:1 to 3 or Psalm 51:1 to 4, read two verses, and pray them aloud in your own words, naming real things, and then let a couple of others try. Ninety seconds of demonstration will do more than a page of explanation. Look back with the class as well at all the Study Skills the series has taught, and encourage them to keep the callouts even if they throw the rest away.

A suggested closing prayer

Pray your own prayer. A sample, if you would like one:

"Father, we have spent twelve weeks in the songs Your people have sung for three thousand years, and we have found Your Son on nearly every page of them. Thank You for the King on Zion, for the Son of Man crowned with glory, for the Holy One You did not abandon to the grave, for the body You prepared, for the Priest at Your right hand, for the stone the builders rejected, and for the throne that has no end. Thank You most of all that the One who cried out in the dust of death is the One who now stands in the midst of the congregation and is not ashamed to call us His brothers. Teach us to sing with our hearts and with our minds. Put Your word in us richly, so that we have something to sing at midnight. Keep us reading and praying these psalms long after this class has ended. And hasten the day when the ends of the earth remember and turn to You, and every creature in heaven and on earth joins the song. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen."

After the study

Do not let the class scatter without a next step. Ask them tonight what they want to take up, and have two or three ready to suggest. A natural sequel is the letter to the Hebrews itself, read straight through, since this study has quarried from it all semester and the class already knows half its argument. A second good option is the book of Acts, watching how the apostles preached Christ from the Old Testament, which is the method this study has been teaching them. A third is the Psalter itself, read devotionally rather than analytically, with the class agreeing on a reading plan and simply comparing notes each week. If several people were gripped by the laments, a shorter study on prayer in the Psalms would serve them well.

Send the class out well. Thank them by name if the group is small enough. Tell them what you noticed growing in them over the twelve weeks, and be specific about it, because most Christians go years without being told. Collect the prayer requests from question 16 and commit out loud to praying them for the next month, then actually do it and tell them when you have. Make yourself available after the last class rather than hurrying to lock up; the person who has been quiet for twelve weeks will often speak only in that last unhurried five minutes. And end the way the lesson ends, on your feet, singing something together, with Hebrews 2:12 in everybody's ears and the Christ who leads the singing standing in the midst of you.