

The Band Played On: The Role Of Music In Worship, Part 1

Various Scriptures

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This morning, we come to another major element of worship, and it's the issue of music. While not equal with the Word, it comes in a close second, as we will discover together in our study today. Music is a crucial part of worship. It's a crucial part of being human. In fact, in *Newsweek*, July 24, 2000, a woman named Sharon Begley wrote an article entitled "Music on the Mind." In that article, Begley described the investigation through a series of experiments, of a University of Toronto psychologist studying the effects that music has on infants. The psychologist, named Sandra Trehub, believes that the human brain comes preloaded with music software, in much the same way that your computer perhaps came, preloaded with Windows. In one of the tests, or experiments, Trehub varied the pitch, tempo and melodic contour of the music, and found that babies, even tiny infants, can detect the changes in all three. In light of that, Begley writes in this article of *Newsweek*, "The infants recognize that a melody whose pitch or tempo has changed is the same melody, for instance, suggesting that they have a rudimentary knowledge of music's components. The real surprise, though, comes when Trehub plays consonant—that is, pleasant—and dissonant passages in an attempt to tease out whether our musical preferences are shaped by culture alone or wired into our brain from birth. Infants, she finds, smile when the air is filled with perfect fourths and perfect fifths." Those of you who are musicians understand that; the rest of us get the idea. She goes on to say, "But babies hate the ugly tritone, in which two notes are separated by six half steps . . . and which sound so unresolved and unstable that in medieval times it was known as 'the devil.' What seems to be a biologically based preference 'may explain the inclusion of perfect fifths and fourths in music across cultures and across centuries,' says Trehub." Begley continues in the article: "Besides the musical babies, several other lines of evidence suggest"—listen to this—"that the human brain is wired for music. Perhaps the most striking hint that the brain holds a special place in its gray matter for music is that people can typically remember scores of tunes, and recognize hundreds more. But we can recall only snatches of a few prose passages"—famous ones like—'Four score and seven years ago.' Also, the article says, "music affects the mind in powerful ways: it not only incites passion, belligerence, serenity or fear, but does so even in people who do not know from experience, for instance, that a particular crescendo means the killer is about to pop out on the movie screen." So even if they've never heard that music, in conjunction with that traumatic event, they still respond traumatically to the music itself. "All in all," the article ends, "the brain seems to be specialized for music." Your brain, hardwired with software for music!

There's only one obvious explanation for this reality, and it's because man is made in the image of God. Have you ever thought about the fact that the reason you hum, the reason you sing, the

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reason—some of you anyway—carry your iPod everywhere you go, is, at its heart, a reflection of the person of God. Think about it. God Himself is constantly surrounded by music. You can go back to the very beginning and you find God surrounded with music all through human history and in eternity, our God is constantly surrounded by music.

But there's something else about music which you may never have considered before. Not only is God surrounded by music, but God Himself sings. There are several passages that hint at this. My favorite is Hebrews chapter 2. Turn there as we begin this morning. Hebrews chapter 2. The writer of Hebrews is talking about Christ, and His death, His sacrifice, and then His great, glorious resurrection. We're talking about Christ in verse 9, who has now been elevated to a place of glory and honor. He's now, according to verse 10, been perfected. So, we're talking about the resurrected, glorified, ascended Christ. It's in that context that the writer of Hebrews makes this startling statement. Verse 11, at the end of verse 11, he says: "for which reason He [that is Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brethren, [that's us; He's not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters]. And then he quotes in verse 12 from Psalm 22, and he puts the words of Psalm 22 in the mouth of Jesus Christ. Remember now, we're talking about the glorified, risen, ascended Christ. And in that context, Jesus says: "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME" [speaking to the Father here] "I will proclaim Your Name, Father," [TO MY BRETHREN, that's us] "IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE."

Listen, when you and I make it to heaven by the grace of God, we will join our voices not only with each other, but with Christ Himself, to bring worship and praise to the Father. Not only is God constantly surrounded with music, but He, Himself, sings.

Now, when you understand that, you can agree then with Martin Luther, who said: "Next to theology," that is, the Word of God, "I gave the first and highest honor to music. Music is God's greatest gift." I had the opportunity this week to sort of take a trip down church history, and to see a pattern. I saw a pattern that every time there was a genuine revival, every time in church history, when the people turned to God in true repentance, it always happened for the same reason: it was because there was a recovery of the preaching of the Word of God. But always, after the Word of God had been preached and proclaimed, after the people had turned in true repentance to God, always in its wake, there was a fresh breeze of new, God-honoring music that swept across the church. Because music is integral to worship. Or to put it another way, where there is authentic, biblical worship, there will always be music.

This morning, I want us to look at what God's Word has to say about the role of music in worship, both individually and corporately. It is absolutely foundational, it is crucial, for us to understand this. I said last week, that the Word of God is the chief element in worship, and it is. But don't misunderstand or downplay the role of music in worship, as we'll see together this morning. This past week, I had a conversation with a man, and he was telling me where he went to church, and I said, "I understand," I'd already mentioned about the man who teaches there, a gifted Bible teacher, and I said, I mentioned about the music. They also, I've heard, had good

music. And his response to me was, “Well, I don’t care about that. I just go there for the Word.” Now, I understand, somewhat, what he was saying. But that is a flawed perspective on the importance of music. The Bible contains more than 600 references to music. This morning, we’re not going to see all 600 references. We’re going to skate across the highlights. This morning and next Lord’s Day, if the Lord wills. The reason we’re going to do that, the reason we’re going to take two Sundays on this issue, is because of the sheer volume of material, but also because this is so controversial in the church today. This issue is, frankly, a place where angels fear to tread. But we’re going to go there together, today and next Sunday.

What I want us to begin to do this morning, is to examine several features of the role of music in worship. The first feature that I want us to examine is the priority of music in worship. When you examine the biblical record, you discover that music has a *huge* place of priority in the kingdom of God. Music rules in the kingdom of God. Now, there are several arguments for the priority of music in worship. Let me give you a few. Again, there are many reasons I could give you; here are some that stood out to me.

First of all, we can say that music should be a priority, and we understand it’s a priority, because it predates the creation of the world. Music was here before this was here. Before you were here, before the world was created, there was music. In Job 38, verse 7, God is talking to Job, and He says to him, at the creation, “the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy . . .” Most commentators agree that’s a reference to the angels. We don’t know when God created the angels, but He apparently created them before He created the universe that we now live in and inhabit. And at the creation of the universe, the angels were there, as it were, looking over the shoulder of God, and they sang the praises of the Great Creator. Music, obviously is important, because it predates even the existence of the world in which we live.

A second argument for the priority of music in worship is that it was consistently, music was consistently part of the worship of God in the Old Testament. You can go back as early as Exodus 15, after the people of God come out of the land of Egypt, God brings them out by the might of His arm, we’re told—on outstretched hand—He bears them out of Egypt, and He delivers them at the Red Sea, and in response to the Red Sea in Exodus 15, they sing the song of the sea: a song of praise to God. All of Israel, nearly two million Israelites there in the desert, lift their voices in exalting and praising God. Deuteronomy 32, we have the song of Moses—his great song, his swan song, if you will—shortly before his death. Deuteronomy 33, the blessing. Judges 5, the song of Deborah, with her great victory. First Samuel 2, Hanna sings a song of praise for what has been accomplished in giving her Samuel. But when you look at Old Testament history, music had a special part in the temple worship. I’m going to show you that in just a few minutes. So I’m not going to give you those examples here, but trust me: that when we look at the sweep of Old Testament history beginning in Exodus 15, all through Old Testament history, but especially the worship at the tabernacle and later the temple, music permeated the worship of God in the Old Testament. More than a hundred times, the Psalms talk about singing, and songs, and lifting praise to God in song.

A third argument for the priority of music in worship is, worship music had a consistent presence in the life of our Lord. Let's fast forward from the Old Testament to the New. And when you look at the life and ministry of our Lord, music had a constant presence in His life. We saw last week, that He was regularly, every Sabbath day, He was at the synagogue. On every Sabbath day, He attended the synagogue, and part of the synagogue service, from its inception, was singing, and music. At the temple, daily, there was music and our Lord participated often at the temple, as you see in His ministry. Every day, morning and evening, there was music, and our Lord was there. He participated in music. At the celebrations of the feast, music was a part of those celebrations, and our Lord was a part of that as well. So, at the very least, weekly, and possibly even daily, our Lord was involved in singing, and with these great feasts and celebrations as well. Of course, the most notable one being the last, at the Last Supper, the celebration of the Passover that Jesus transformed into the Lord's Table; at that great celebration, we're told at the end of it, they sang a hymn, and departed. Music was a part of the life of our Lord and therefore, by that very fact, it shows the priority of it for us.

A fourth argument we can use for the priority of music is the New Testament commands that music be part of our worship. Turn to Ephesians chapter 5. A familiar passage in Paul's writings, Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 18, Paul writes:

And do not get drunk with wine [don't be dominated by, or controlled by, or intoxicated by, permeated by wine], for that is dissipation, but rather I want you to be filled with the Spirit [I want you to be controlled by the Spirit, be permeated by the Spirit, in the same way that a drunk person is permeated by wine], speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

Now we'll talk more about the content of our singing next time, both the style and the content; here, we're told "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs"; we'll investigate what each of those is, but I want you to see the big picture. Did you notice that the very first evidence of being filled with the Spirit—or being controlled by the Word as it's put in Colossians 3, parallel passage—the very first evidence is singing. Where there is the presence of the Spirit in power, there is music. "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." It is both a natural outcome of the presence and control of the Spirit, and it is a command to us. And therefore, it is a priority in the life of every Christian, and the Church as a whole.

A fifth argument we can give for the priority of music in worship is, when we leave this life, music will always be a channel for the worship of God. We will sing, accompanied by instruments, in the presence of God forever. Turn to Revelation chapter 5. John, through the vision he was given, gives us a glimpse into heavenly worship. And there we find instruments, and we find singing. Revelation chapter 5, verse 8:

When He [that is Christ, the Lamb]—had taken the scroll, the four living creatures [a reference to the cherubim] and the twenty-four elders [that's representative of the Church; so angels, heavenly beings, and humans redeemed by Christ] fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying . . .

Worship in music, both with instruments and with human voices, and the voices of angels will be present in eternity. What we do here as we sing to God is really a small, faint echo of the reality of what it will be like, in the presence of God.

Now let me ask you in light of the obvious priority placed upon music in the Scripture, just in this brief survey as we've sort of flown over it at thirty thousand feet and seen the peaks, let me ask you: does music centered on God have that kind of priority in your life? Or are you like the man who said, "Well, I don't really care about the music. You know, I'm just interested in the Word"? You cannot say that if you care about the Word because of the place music is given in the Scripture itself. It's not just something we do corporately, although we do it corporately; music is also supposed to be a part of our individual worship throughout every day. Over and over, the psalmist says something like he says in Psalm 104, verse 33: "I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being."

Is that the expression of your heart? It certainly was of the psalmist, over and over again.

Now music is a wonderful gift. And God has given it to us for a variety of reasons. If you surveyed the Old Testament particularly, you'll find that music was used in a variety of daily activities. It was certainly at celebrations like weddings. It was accompanying funerals, and also was used in just man's daily work. We find men digging trenches in the Old Testament, singing. There's nothing wrong with the use of music in those ways. There's nothing wrong with Christians listening to secular music. Scripture doesn't forbid that. My own music taste, honestly, are very eclectic, very broad. I can enjoy just about any kind of music, as long as the lyrics are acceptable. But if your iPod or your CD collection is more about Mozart or Lincoln Park or Fergie, or Emerson Drive, or whoever else than it is Christ, then there is a serious problem. The problem is deeper than your music taste. What it means is that you are not, according to Paul in Ephesians 5, permeated by, or controlled by, the Word of God. You are not spiritually mature. For the Spirit-filled Christian, music that worships God is an absolute priority. And all other expressions of music take second place to that. It's a priority.

Now the second feature that we need to examine about the role of music is the purpose of music in worship. The question that comes to my mind is, why? I love music as you do. But why is it so important in worship? Well, Scripture identifies several purposes and again, this is not a exhaustive list, but I tried to pull out the primary reasons that are identified by Scripture.

The first purpose of music, as identified by the Scripture, is to give expression to our hearts; to give expression to our hearts. Music enables us to take what we think and what we feel, and express that to God. It expresses, for example, our praise. The praise, that wells up within our hearts can be expressed through music. In Psalm 66 verse 4: “All the earth will worship You And sing praises to You; They shall sing praises to Your name.” It gives expression not only to our praise, but to our thanksgiving. Psalm 33, verse 2: “Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; (that’s l-y-r-e, not l-i-a-r; lyre was sort of a portable version of the harp, and a lot like our modern day guitar: it has a lot of resemblances) Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings.”

We can get expression to our hearts in praise and thanksgiving, but also in confession. Have you ever thought about this? Music is an expression of even our confession of sin. Psalm 51, that great psalm of David, was written to be sung: a prayer of confession to be sung, accompanied by instruments. So, even our confession can take its wings on music. We express our hearts in praise and thanksgiving, and confession. We even express our petitions in music, our requests. Turn back to Psalm 5. You see this Psalm of David, looking at the description that begins the psalm: “For the choir director; for flute accompaniment. A Psalm of David.” And notice now, here’s the song that’s to be sung, and it gives voice or expression, not to praise, not to thanksgiving, not to confession, but to prayer, to a request. Verse 1: Give ear to my words, O LORD, Consider my groaning. Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, For to You I pray. In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice; In the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch.

So even prayer, prayer for what we need, can express itself in psalm. So music, first and foremost, gives expression to our hearts.

A second purpose of music, not only to give expression to our hearts, and this may surprise you, to teach us God’s truth. One of the purposes for music is to teach us. Now the reason that’s surprising is because today, most people see music as entertainment. There are probably very few songs in your repertoire, whatever that might be, that you see as teaching you. Many Christians in fact see the primary role of music as emotional. But music was designed by God to be a teaching tool. Turn to Colossians chapter 3. Paul makes this point very clearly in Colossians 3:16, the parallel passage to Ephesians 5:19. As he writes to the church in Colossae, he says in verse 16: “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you,” (now, the benefits, or the results, I guess I should say, that flow from this are exactly the same as “being filled with the Spirit” in Ephesians 5; and so, being filled with the Spirit is the same thing as being controlled by the Scripture, allowing the Word of Christ to dwell in you richly. They’re the same thing. Being dominated by the Spirit means being dominated by the Word; being dominated by the Word means being dominated by the Spirit. And notice the outcome:) “with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

Now Paul, here, is unambiguous about one of the chief purposes of music in the Church. Did you see it? He says, “I want you to teach and admonish one another . . .” How? “With psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . .”; by singing. We teach spiritual truth through music. A good example of that is one of my favorite songs, “Before the Throne of God Above.” I don’t know about you, but there are times when I find myself absolutely discouraged about the sin in my heart, about the fact that I’m not all that I want to be, all that Christ wants me to be. And my mind goes to that second verse of that song often: “When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see Him there Who made an end to all my sin. Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free; For God, the Just, is satisfied to look on him and pardon me.”

You see, there’s teaching about the truth of my acceptance before Christ in that song. We learn from the music we sing, or we should.

And on the heels of that, a third purpose of music is to aid our memory of the truth. Not only to teach us the truth, but to aid our memory of the truth. In 1 Chronicles 16:4, this is a very interesting verse, as David puts music into place in the tabernacle, it says “David appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the LORD, even to celebrate and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel.” This is when David instituted the music in the worship of God in the tabernacle. He says: “I want to do this, to celebrate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel.” “Celebrate” is really not a good translation: what the Hebrew actually says is “I want them to ‘remember’ the LORD, the God of Israel.” I’m going to have them praise, and I’m going to have them sing, in order to remember the LORD, the God of Israel. Poetry, and especially poetry put into music, has always been a way to help us remember. Perhaps you learned, as I did, the English alphabet through music. [Singing:] A-B-C-D-E-F-G . . . I still remember it. That’s how you learn the alphabet. Because music enables us to remember. I’m about to date myself here, but there was a game show many years ago called *Name That Tune*. And it was fascinating because they could play just a few notes and immediately people could identify, just through a handful of notes, the title of the song, and even the lyrics that were part of that song. Because music enables us to remember and, in a biblical sense, it enables us to remember the truth. Theologian John Frame writes: “Poetic musical forms impart vividness and memorability to God’s Word; that vividness and memorability in turn drive the Word into our hearts, so that it becomes precious to us, and motivates us to praise and obedience.” Most of the Psalms in ancient Israel would have been committed to memory. They were sung constantly. For example, Psalms 120 to 134, if you look at those Psalms, each of them in their titles has the expression: “A psalm of ascents,” that is, ascending somewhere. They were the Psalms that were sung on the way, three times a year, as the Israelites left their place all over the land and ascended to Jerusalem, to the temple. (You ascended because of the topography of the land. From just about anywhere in Israel, Jerusalem was up.) And so, as they ascended to those feasts, to those celebrations on three occasions annually, they were to sing these Psalms. So as they marched on their feet without a scroll in their hands, they committed these Psalms to memory

and the truths of these Psalms, the truth about God and His ways were much more easily remembered when married to music.

A fourth purpose that music stands is to glorify God. Not only to express our hearts, to teach us God's truth, aid our memory of the truth, but simply to glorify God. God created music—and everything else, for that matter—for the sole purpose of bringing Him glory. Listen to Paul in Romans 11:36. You are familiar with the verse: “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things to. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Notice that: “For from Him,” that is, God is the source of all things. “And through Him,” that is, God sustains all things. “And to Him,” that is, God is the end of all things. What does it mean, God is the end of all things? Look at that next phrase: “To Him be the glory forever.” That's what it means. Ultimately, everything God has created, including music, exists for one great eternal purpose: to bring Him glory. That's why there is music. It's not for our selfish use. It's a tool to bring glory to God.

So we've seen the priority of worship in music. We've seen the purpose of music. A third feature we need to examine together is the support of music in worship, or the resources for music in worship. You see, God not only commands us to include music as part of our worship, but He gives us wonderful resources that enrich our worship in music. Resources like instruments, and orchestras, and choirs, and music directors. These resources are clearly and explicitly set forth in the Old Testament, and they are affirmed in the New. I want you to see this, because many of us grew up in churches where we did what we did because it was tradition. And that's the only reason or explanation we had for it. But there is some biblical basis. There are biblical grounds for some of the things that we do in worship. Let's look at the Old Testament pattern first of all. Let me show you the Old Testament pattern of these resources that were available for music in worship. Very early in Old Testament history, we're introduced to musical instruments. In fact, the seventh generation from Adam, we meet a man in Genesis chapter 4, called Jubal. In Genesis 4:21, we learn that Jubal was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. He was the father of musical instruments; he was the first maker and player of musical instruments. The first time we encounter someone using those instruments specifically in the praise of God is in Exodus 15:20. When Miriam and the women of Israel sang a song praise to God for the defeat of the Egyptian army, they sang, we're told, to the accompaniment of the timbrel, or what some translations have the tambourine. It was something like out tambourine, but without the metal jingles, if you can picture that. It was more like a small handheld personal drum. And it was used to sing praise to God as they sang that great song of the sea there in Exodus 15.

Now I want to fast forward over the rest of Old Testament history and get to David, because while instruments of various kinds were used in worship before David, it was David who made them part of the tabernacle in temple worship. In fact, were told in Chronicles that David identified 4,000 Levites who were to be responsible for the music at the tabernacle. Four

thousand. And later, that same number at the temple, when Solomon, his son, built the temple. Most of those 4,000 were to be instrumentalists. They were assigned and trained to play certain instruments. Can you imagine how wonderful that would have sounded? Four thousand instruments. In 1 Chronicles 15:1, we read David spoke to the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their relatives the singers with instruments of music, harps, lyres, loud-sounding cymbals, to raise sounds of joy. In 1 Chronicles 23:5, we read that “4,000 were praising the LORD with the instruments which David made for giving praise”.

Now the question is when? When did these musicians, almost four thousand musicians, play? Well, turn with me to 1 Chronicles chapter 23. First Chronicles 23:30. Here the specific assignments are given, and he says: “They are to stand every morning to thank and to praise the LORD, and likewise at evening”. They’re to do this in conjunction with the burnt offerings, and they’re to do it not only every morning and every evening, but they’re to do it on the Sabbaths (that’s once a week every week, on the seventh day), they’re to do it at the new moons (those were special monthly festivals or feasts, events), and the fixed festivals in the number set by the ordinance concerning them, continually before the LORD.

So, this is when they were to play. These musicians were to lead worship in music at the temple every morning and every evening, probably in conjunction with the sacrifices morning and evening, and every Sabbath, and every special festival or feast day. They had a busy schedule. And if you read 1 and 2 Chronicles, you discover what kinds of instruments these were. It’s very interesting, because instruments from all the categories of instruments are spoken of: wind instruments, string instruments, and percussion instruments. For example, on the wind instruments, we read about trumpets, and ram’s horns, and flutes, and pipes. The pipe was usually something that was joined into a single mouthpiece, but had two reeds coming down with a number of holes. Some speculate that one of the pipes was like a drone pipe, always blowing the same note much as a dulcimer would today, and then the other pipe could be played with different fingers on different holes, so that you had different sounds. Those were the wind instruments. Strings, the lyres mentioned, I’ve already mentioned that it was like a small version of the harp, it was portable. The harp, much like the one that’s on the platform this morning, you would have seen in ancient Israel, 10 strings and other stringed instruments, and lute. Percussion, there were two percussion instruments that are mentioned: one is the cymbals, they are like, you can picture, small bowls, and they were usually bronze and usually played up and down; very similar to our cymbals today. And then, the final percussion instrument that’s mentioned, I’ve already alluded to was the timbrel, or a small drum, like a personal drum that could be played.

Now, there are a couple of observations I want to make about those instruments. First of all, they weren’t special temple instruments. They weren’t church instruments. Those were the musical instruments of ancient Israel. You won’t find other musical instruments mentioned anywhere in any of the celebrations of any kind, secular or sacred, in the Old Testament. In addition to that, they were not only the instruments of ancient Israel, but if you read the history

of the surrounding countries, these same instruments were the same instruments that were used in the pagan countries surrounding them. What that means is that God, listen carefully because this runs contrary to much of what you hear taught, what that means is that God has sanctioned all instruments from all the categories, for worship. Now understand that there maybe certain instruments that you like and certain instruments that you don't like: even ones you heard this morning. That's fine; we all have our preferences. But biblically, understand that there are no instruments that are off-limit in the worship of God, period. Trumpets, and tympanis, violins, violas, mouth harps, marimbas, drums, guitars, and organs are all acceptable. So, get it out of your mind that there's any kind of musical instruments that is outlawed by the Scripture, or is second class in worship. That is a fabrication. It doesn't exist in Scripture.

Now, in addition to the orchestra and all the variety of instruments, there were choirs and vocalists. These were also a prescribed part of Israel's worship. Of those 4,000 Levites I mentioned, 288 were to be a huge choir. Look at 1 Chronicles 25:6. He just alluded to the children of Heman that he had 14 sons and 3 daughters, and all of those children, verse 6 says:

under the direction of their father to sing in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, harps and lyres, for the service of the house of God Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the direction of the king. Their number who were trained in singing to the LORD (notice they were trained, they were skilled in singing to the LORD) with their relatives, all who were skillful, was 288.

So most of the 4,000 were instrumentalists, but about 300 of them made a great choir, a huge choir, and as I pointed out, it was composed while primarily of men, they were both men and women, who were part of it. You see that again in Ezra 2:65, where there were 200 male and female singers in Ezra's day.

So there were choirs. In addition to that, God also appointed music directors to lead the musical element of the corporate worship. Skilled, trained men who led. In 1 Chronicles 15:27, Chenaniah is the one who is leader of the singing we're told. You fast forward to the time of Nehemiah, at the end of Old Testament history, and in Nehemiah 12:42 and 46, we meet men who are called the leaders: the choir directors, the leaders of the orchestra, or the leaders of the singing. Fifty-five of the Psalms begin with the phrase: "For the choir director."

It wasn't just Levites who sang, however, under the direction of this music director. There was also congregational singing. In Ezra 3:11, we learned that they joined, the congregation, joined with the choir; it wasn't always just the choir singing. So understand that's the broad brush picture of worship in the temple, in the tabernacle, and later in the temple. There were a variety of musical instruments, there were vocalists, there was a choir, there was a music director, and there was congregational singing. So did David come up with this idea all on his own? No, all those things weren't David's idea; they came by divine command. The command for congregational singing, for choirs, for musical instruments, for a music director, was from the

Lord. Look at 2 Chronicles chapter 29. The writer of Chronicles couldn't make it any clearer. Second Chronicles 29:25. This is in the time of Hezekiah, when Hezekiah the king restored the true worship of God. There was a revival because of the preaching of the Word of God, as I said before, and then comes music. Verse 25:

He [Hezekiah] stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the LORD through His prophets. The Levites stood with the musical instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets.

The music of the worship of God in the Old Testament was specifically dictated by God. Now the question I have about these supports or resources for music in worship is why. What are they to do? Why do we need these people, these gifted people? Why instruments? Why choir? Why even a music director? Well, the short answer is, they are to encourage and support the singing of God's people. You're still there in 2 Chronicles 29. Look at verse 28: "While the whole assembly worshiped, the singers sang and the trumpets sounded." You see, it's all happening together. While the singers sang and the instruments played, the congregation sang and worshipped. That is the Old Testament pattern in a nut shell.

These resources are available to encourage us to worship. Now, does the New Testament affirm this? That's obviously what the Old Testament shows as a pattern, but does the New Testament affirm all that we've looked at together? Well, some look at the New Testament and come to some strange conclusions: even men I respect, for example, you know I respect John Calvin, one of the greatest Bible expositors in the history of the Church. He looked and said, because it's not commanded in the New Testament, then we're only going to sing the Psalms, and we're only going to sing without instruments. Huldrych Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, excluded *all* music from the corporate worship. It was Martin Luther, the great reformer, who embraced the role of music with his whole heart, who wrote a number of songs, and really brought back the congregational singing of the Church, and the role music. There's still those however, who reject music in one form or another, for example, the Church of Christ. They'll say things like this: Instruments and choirs were fine for Old Testament Israel, but you don't find them in the New Testament. There's also a battle raging today in some Presbyterian circles over issues like, should they have choir, should they have instruments, or should we merely sing metrical songs. Now, against all of those things, there are two clear arguments. There are many arguments, by the way; I compiled a list this week. But let me give you the two strongest arguments, I think, against rejecting all of those things that were resources in support in the Old Testament to worship in music.

Number one: God commanded instruments, and choirs, and music directors in the Old Testament. He commanded it. We just read that in 2 Chronicles 29; and no text in the New Testament sets aside the use of those things in worship. The New Testament does that in the

case of some things, doesn't it? It tells us there's not going to be a temple anymore, it tells us we're not going to make sacrifices anymore because Christ was the perfect fulfillment, but there are other things that happened in the temple that continue. Prayer, for example. It happened at the temple twice a day, but that's not discontinued and we're not told to discontinue it. Neither is there any command to set aside the worship in music, as it appeared in the Old Testament.

A second reason, however, that we can continue to use these tools, these resources in our worship, is we are told in the New Testament to sing the Psalms. We saw that in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3. We're told to sing the Psalms. And the Psalms, themselves, prescribe the use of instruments in worship. I read Psalm 150 this morning. Many of the other Psalms do the same thing. And also, when you look at the word "psalm," it's actually a Hebrew word that has been transliterated. That word in both Hebrew and in Greek in the New Testament in those passages, Colossians 3, Ephesians 5, is a word that literally means: "to sing accompanied by strings." So the very command to sing the Psalms is at its heart a command to use musical instruments.

There's also one other interesting argument. In Ephesians 5:19, it says: "I want you to sing," which is a word referring to producing music with the use of your voice, and then he says: "I want you to make melody." That word is a verb form of "psalm." So it means to pluck a stringed instrument. So it's very possible that Paul was saying: "I want you to have vocal singing in your worship, and I want you to have that accompanied by instruments." Fifty-five of the Psalms sanction the use of a choir and a choir director. We're commanded to sing the Psalms in their sanction, and never are they forbidden for New Testament Christians.

When you look at the sweep of that the Scriptures teach, worship in music must be a priority for every one of us. And corporate worship in music involves a variety of musicians, singers, and even a music director. And all of those resources exist to encourage our active participation. And when we do participate, it gives expression to worship and praise. It teaches us the truth of God. It aids our memory of the truth and ultimately, it brings glory to God.

I think the clearest and most profound biblical example of music accomplishing all of this, is in 2 Chronicles chapter 5. And I want you to turn there as we close this morning. Second Chronicles chapter 5. The scenario is the dedication of the temple. Solomon has completed the work and now the ark of God is being brought into the temple. Second Chronicles 5:11:

When the priests came forth from the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to divisions), and all the Levitical singers [here's that four thousand], Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, (their choir robes—I'm just kidding, mostly—they're certainly they were dressed differently, but I don't necessarily think that's an argument for choir robes, but you see they were), with cymbals, harps and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty

priests blowing trumpets in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the LORD saying, “He indeed is good for His lovingkindness—that is, His steadfast love—is everlasting,” then the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

The Shekinah of God, that blazing display, visible display of His presence, filled the temple.

This place that we worship in this morning is not the temple. The New Testament tells us *you* are the house of God. And as we lift our worship in music to God, our God delights in it just as He did in this majestic scene in the Old Testament. May we praise our God in music like that. Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for the amazing gift of music. We thank You that You have tuned our hearts, literally, to sing Your praise, twice tuned, at the time when You created us and at the time when You redeemed us. Father, we thank You that for all eternity we will be able to offer You our praise, and our worship, and our thanksgiving in music. Lord, I pray that You would help us to understand its value, to make it a priority in our lives. Lord, don’t let us discount its place. Help us to join our voices in this life in a faint echo, and then, in eternity, in full voice. We pray it in Jesus’ name, amen.