

The Music of the Gospel

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Date: 30 January 2022

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[0 : 00] So we're going to turn now and read from God's word from Psalm 150. If you have a Bible, please do turn there and it will also be on the screens.

Psalm 150. And this is God's word. Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary. Praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his mighty deeds.

Praise him according to his excellent greatness.

Praise him with trumpet sound. Praise him with lute and harp. Praise him with tambourine and dance. Praise him with strings and pipe.

Praise him with sounding cymbals. Praise him with loud clashing cymbals. Let everything that has breath. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.

[1 : 01] This is God's word. We're ending the series today on the Psalms. We've been exploring Psalms from each of the different five books of Psalms and looking at how actually there's a unity in the midst of the diversity of Psalms.

There's all sorts of Psalms that we have and it's striking in this musical prayer book that God's given us that the very last Psalm is the one we just read Psalm 150.

In that in the midst of the diversity of Psalms, so many of the Psalms are about sorrow and about lamentation and about grieving and David and others praying desperate prayers to God asking for help.

And then you come to the very end. And if there is a real unity, if the compilers of the Psalms were really trying to do something with the way the Psalms are structured, after so many Psalms of lamentation, the prayer book that God's given us ends in joyful praise and it ends in a command. It was very clear here to sing songs to God and then you ask, well, how should we do that? And it says do it with symbols and with lute and harp and with the instruments.

[2 : 12] And it's very clear here that God is saying, I want you to worship me in music. And so the Psalm book has all sorts of diversity. And then at the very end, it ends with the command of God, the hallelujah.

Praise the Lord and praise the Lord with music. Now let's ignore every single debate in our denominations history, if you're familiar with this, about Psalm 150 this morning and about all that it says here and get more foundational than that.

And that's to see actually the significance that God commands us to make music to God. And I think one of the things that's implicit in this text when you really dig underneath it is that actually music and the gospel go hand in hand.

And so we're going to see three lessons from this Psalm this morning that pull that out. The first is we'll see the God of music here in Psalm 150. And then the music of deliverance and finally the power of music.

So let's look at that first, the God of music. Derek's mentioned the past couple of weeks that the Psalms, we know, of course, are songs because in part there was a choir at the temple in Jerusalem that would sing these songs.

[3 : 26] And he, the past couple of weeks showed us how these songs would have been sung on the way to the pilgrimage feast by the Israelites on their journeys to Jerusalem every year.

And also Israelites would sing them in their homes. They were songs. They were meant to be sung. And we know very clearly in the Psalms across the Old Testament, God commands over and over again to objectively worship him by way of music.

So music is one of the, one of the significant ways God has said, objectively sing out to me a song and worship me by way of music that God receives our worship when we sing to him.

And at the same time, we know that music has an immense subjective power as well. So objectively God hears and commands music to be made to him, but then subjectively music is one of the unusual realities of existence that has immense subjective power at the same time.

And we all know of experiences in our lives where music has really moved us, has really done significant things in the midst of our heart. There's not a single parent out there that has ever had to teach a child to dance in the kitchen when you turn the tunes on while you're cooking dinner.

[4 : 44] They do it instinctively. They do it, they know that they're to be affected and to be changed and to react to music. Kurt Vonnegut is one of the famous American authors.

He wrote a controversial book called *The Slaughterhouse Five*. But Kurt Vonnegut was also the president throughout most of his life of the American, the American Humanist Association, which is an avowedly atheistic, anti-organized religion organization that's prominent in the U.S.

And at the same time, when literary scholars today look at Vonnegut and his diaries and his life, one of the things that they say about him is that he seems to have been nevertheless Christ-haunted his entire life.

And he says a number of things about that. And one of his letters, he writes that he admires Christianity and he especially admires Jesus because Jesus brought, he writes, common people around a common table.

So Kurt was appreciative of the hospitality aspect of Christians and churches. But in another moment, the scholars will talk about these moments where Kurt couldn't help but step back away from his committed atheism because of experiences he had had.

[6 : 01] And he writes about one of them in one of his letters. He says this, music is to me proof of the existence of God. It is so extraordinarily full of magic.

And in the tough times of my life, I turn to music and I listen to music and it makes such a difference. There's not a person out there, no matter what you believe in, no matter what religion you were raised in, or no matter if you're an atheist or agnostic, that doesn't come to music and have an experience of being moved deeply by some invisible power that's inexplicable, something that we all participate in.

It can't be merely subjective because we know that music is not something we first make, it's first something we receive and we react to it. It happens to us before we ever produce it.

And so that's why theologians throughout the centuries, the church throughout the centuries has talked about music as the sixth proof for the existence of God.

There's normally been five famous proofs for God's existence from arguments like the moral order. Everybody seems to know something of the moral law. There must be a moral law giver or something of the purpose.

[7 : 16] Everybody feels like there's purpose to human existence. There must be one who gives purpose or the physical laws. The sun keeps rising every single day and gravity stays constant.

Why? Because there must be a law giver that keeps these things in place. But music has also been called the sixth proof of God's existence because like those same things, music has this objective order and law to it.

It operates under mathematical precision and chords and harmonies. And at the same time, it has this immense subjective power to work on us from the inside out and to change us.

And so the question, you come to Psalm 150 and you see God commands humanity and everything that has breath to worship God by way of song.

And if you were to ask a foundational, maybe even philosophical question like why, why is it that music is so important to God in the way that we worship God and ask a question next to it, why is it that music seems to affect us so much?

[8 : 21] Those are actually one and the same question or they have the exact same answer. And it's right here in the first couple of verses of the Psalm and Psalm 150 verse one and two, we're given a couple of reasons to make music to God.

And the first one, it says, sing to the Lord, sorry, that's 4950, praise him in his sanctuary. Very literally that word sanctuary right there is actually the word holiness in the Hebrew text that stands behind this English translation.

So it says praise God in his holiness. And the reason they've put sanctuary there is because what they mean by holiness is that God is in the holy place in the heavenly temple.

And when he commissioned the earthly temple in the Old Testament, the earthly temple was to mimic the heavenly temple. And in the holy of holies, God is seated. He is in his holiness. He's in his sanctuary. So it's saying praise him. In other words, it's saying before you make music to him, first look up and see that God is the king enthroned in his holy place in his utter holiness in the heavenly temple.

[9 : 31] And then the second reason it gives here is to then also look back. It says, well, and look in history as well in the Old Testament and see the mighty deeds of God. In other words, it's saying to be motivated to make music to the Lord, the Psalmist writes, look up and look back.

And those are the two reasons. Now, when you do that, when you look up and you look back, first, let me say something about looking up. You look up and you see God.

You think about God and his holiness. There's a text just about that Isaiah chapter six that pulls back the curtain on the heavenly temple and allows us to see for a moment what Isaiah sees.

And when you when that happens, what is right there in Isaiah six? We see the angels and the cherubs and the seraph singing and they're saying, holy, holy, they're singing the song. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God.

And we sing that song sometimes in our congregation as well. And what you learn is that when you look up at the heavenly temple, heaven is a soundscape of music.

[10 : 35] That there's a constant reciprocal song being sung. And we learn that it's not only the angel singing, but that God sings in different places throughout scripture. God sings back.

He speaks and his voice is like a trumpet. The text tells us and he sings back to the heavenly house. But if you not only look up and know that the heavenly temple is full of music, it's a soundscape, but also if you look back throughout the Old Testament, you see something incredibly similar.

Peter Lighthouse is one of them, a really good American theologian. And he writes this, he's thought a lot about music in scripture. And this is what he writes. He says, Sopranos can break a glass with a high C note.

But God in Psalm 29 by his voice breaks the cedar trees. Psalm 29 were told that God sings, his voice goes forth in the cedar trees break, just like a soprano might break a glass with a high C note. And it's not only God's power in his voice, his voice as song, but in Zephaniah 3 it says that God sings over his restored bride.

[11 : 46] So it's not only that his voice goes forth in the power of song, creative song, but that God turns and uses his voice to sing a song over the people that he's come to rescue over his bride.

And that's what the entire song of song, song of Solomon is about. It's a love song where God sings over his bride through the metaphor of Solomon and his bride.

He sings over, he loves her. God sings songs over his people. He sings songs in power, in, into creation. And he sings amongst his host in the heavenlies and in Isaiah 5 even God sings a song of lamentation over his lost vineyard.

Israel has been conquered and he sings a song of sorrow over Israel, the loss of Israel. In other words, the point, the question, why is it that God commands, calls us in Psalm 150 at the end to sing, to make music to him?

And why is it that music is so powerful? Why is it that music so affects us both objectively? Why is it so real and subjectively? It has such immense weight in our lives.

[12 : 55] And it's this God, God made music. God sings both in heaven and on earth. And God loves to receive music as praise.

But if you dig underneath that even further, what, what is it? Why this music and this is the reason I think our music, human music, the music that we've received from God and that we make to God is actually a mimic, an image of the beauty of God's voice.

We make music because we're in the image of the Lord. And as the image of God, we're able to make music that mimics when it's good music. The image, it mimics God's, the beauty of God's very voice.

We take that which is beautiful that, that God has given us and we return it back to the one who is utter beauty. And so the reason we make music is because our God is a God most musical.

Here's my cliche stock, C.S. Lewis, J.R. Tolkien illustration. Tolkien and Lewis, the author of Lord of the Rings and of Chronicles of Narnia, both talked about this in their Inklings meetings in the middle of the 20th century.

[14:08] And they were trying to get at this. Tolkien wrote a book called The Silmarillion, which is much more boring than The Lord of the Rings. But at the very beginning of it, he offers a creation myth and it's the creation myth of Middle Earth, the earth of the Lord of the Rings.

And in it, the God, he calls him a Luvitar. A Luvitar sings creation into being. And in Lewis's Narnia, in the second book, The Magician's Nephew, Aslan comes into Narnia and it's a wasteland and the children are there and they get to watch and Aslan sings order into creation.

And Lewis writes that the children have never heard such a beautiful voice, a beautiful song in all of their lives. And they were getting at something. And that's that many theologians have talked about the fact that our God, the Triune God three and one, God, the Father, he speaks, his voice goes forth and God, the Son is the word, the very lyrics of God's speech.

And God, the Spirit is the breath, the actual song that goes forth into the world. We see him organizing creation according to the word of God all the way back in Genesis one.

And that's why Paul in the Book of Ephesians gives this incredibly strange line, another important text in the history of our denomination where Paul commands us to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

[15:41] But just before that, he attaches that command to the weirdest phrase and he says, do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.

And so, seeing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, he says, well, Paul, what are you saying? What is being drunk and filled with the Spirit have to do with singing? And you see what he's saying, he's saying, let the Spirit give you a song to sing, not the wine.

Don't be merry and sing because of being drunk, but because the Spirit has filled you up. And we get that in Isaiah 40, sorry, Psalm 40, when it says, God has put a new song into my mouth.

And specifically, the Spirit of God puts a new song into our mouth. I'll end this longer point by saying, with this, Jeremy Begbie, a theologian, a British theologian who's at Duke University in the States, he writes actually that it's so difficult for us to think of ways to talk about God and to think about how God is three in one, Father, Son, and Spirit, and yet one God, the same in essence.

And Jeremy Begbie points out that one of the best ways to do that as a human being, to think about that, is actually the metaphor of the musical chord. Because the chord is three notes, but it's one sound.

[17:04] It's one in essence, but three in number. And it's one of the great metaphors for who God is because our God is a God most musical. He commands us to sing because he sings.

And he sings over us and he sings to us. And there also is here a third reason to sing praise to God we're given.

And this is about the music of deliverance. You can see it right there. Not only praise God in his holiness, praise God for his mighty deeds, but then there's another one in verse two, praise him according to his excellent greatness, the text tells us.

Excellent greatness is a common translation of that word, but that word is full of meaning in the way it shows up throughout the Bible.

And one of the ways to know exactly what the Psalmist is saying to us here is to actually recognize that Psalm 150 is a part of a set of five Psalms that all come together at the end of the Psalm book, 146 through 150.

[18:09] They're part of the Hallel's. They all say praise the Lord sing hallelujah to God. But we've been talking about the unity and diversity of the Psalms. There's a unity in the last five Psalms.

There's sort of a logic that develops over the course of the last five Psalms. And if you looked at each one of them, we're not going to do it. Don't worry. And you could whittle it down to just one sentence of which each of the last five Psalms is saying there's a structure to it.

And Psalm 146 says praise God, make music to God instead of princes instead of the kings of the earth, because he is the true king. And we see that right here in verse one.

Praise him in his holiness. It's a king. It's a kingship. It's a reason because he's king. That's what Psalm 146 says. 147 says praise him because he builds up Jerusalem with people.

So the king in Psalm 146 then founds a kingdom in Psalm 147. The king needs a people to be the king. And so he creates a people. Psalm 149, the skip one says praise him because he then judges all the other kings in justice.

[19:15] So only this king can actually bring justice to the world. And then if you step back to Psalm 148 at the very end, it gives the reason to praise him at the very end of Psalm 148. And this

is what it says.

Praise him because he has raised up a horn for his people. Now the other ones are clear. That one's different. Praise him because he's raised up a horn for his people.

And that's actually a really significant metaphor that gets used all throughout the Old Testament that we don't talk about very often. But it has two meanings. It's literally talking there about a bull's horn or the horn of a bull.

And it says praise him because he has raised up the horn. Sometimes that phrase is used in scripture as the horn of salvation. And it's two meanings are this. And it's saying God is a God who has the power like a bull to save his people in their imperial.

So sometimes the horn of salvation is referring to God's power to deliver people from anything, to take people up out of slavery, to take people up from the misery of their own sin, to do anything he can deliver.

[20 : 25] And then at the same time, the metaphor gets used right after that to then say, and you have raised up in my life a horn of salvation. Hannah at the beginning of the books of Samuel says this, she sings a song to God and she said, Lord, because of this child you've given me, you have lifted up a horn.

You've put a horn into my hands. Meaning it's being used as an instrument. And it's saying God who is who is powerful to deliver anybody also then puts the horn in your hand as an instrument, as a trumpet to return to God with music, with praise.

And so it's got this double entendre throughout scripture. Now in Psalm 150, at the first three, first couple of things, it's over viewing all the reasons to praise God that have already been there in the previous four Psalms.

And when it says praise God here for his excellent greatness, it's referring there to something very specific. And we see it all throughout the Old Testament.

It's directly related to the horn of salvation for God the deliverer, because this word greatness shows up all across the Old Testament and always means God's work to redeem Israel from the pit of slavery.

[21 : 38] You see it in Deuteronomy 3 and Moses says, writes that we praise you God for all your greatness, your many greatneses. And he's talking there about each of the moments God delivered the people of God from captivity from their own sense, from their own grumbling from Egypt.

It means deliverance. It means it's about it's specifically saying praise God for his work of salvation. Now the Psalms make clear that we've got to look backwards in order to praise God and we've got to look up in order to praise God.

But at the same time, the Psalms all across make it very clear too that there is a looking forward that all the people who would have sang these songs in the Old Testament were left to do.

That there was a, David wrote so many of them, but there was a David's son that they were waiting to sing about, a true horn of salvation, a true deliverer.

And when you go to the New Testament, and we read about this in our first reading, Jesus Christ on the night that he was betrayed, he institutes the Lord's Supper.

[22 : 46] And then maybe you remember verse 26 from the Mark reading we did just a moment ago. It says he got up from table and he sang before he went to the Garden of Gethsemane.

And we know that on Passover night, it was custom that they would sing Psalm 113 to 118 at the end of the meal, which are the first set of Hallel Psalms that parallel the set of Hallel Psalms that we're reading about at the end of the Psalter.

Jesus Christ on the night he was betrayed to prepare his heart to go to death, he lifted up his voice in song because he needed the power of song and worship before his God to do what he was about to do.

And you know, on the night he was betrayed in the next day when he was crucified, he went to the cross and he sent, he, it's the text tells us he cried out and he said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He sang out before all the people into his father, Psalm 22. He sang the song and he went to die for us and he went to die for us singing the whole way.

[23 : 56] He was completely judged. You see, he is, Jesus Christ is the one that Colossians one tells us is the very lyrics of God going forth into creation to hold all of existence together.

And this God shows up in the middle of history, singing a song to uplift his heart as he goes to die for every single one of you. For me, the judge, the creator judged completely and broken in our place.

His voice can break the cedars of Lebanon. And when he went to the cross, his body and soul was completely broken for us. And you see, he's saying this, these Psalms of lamentation and woe and praise as he went to the cross so that today you could know that Jesus Christ sings a song over you.

He has, Jesus Christ wants to, desires to look at you, each and every one of you today and say and sing over you like a, like the husband sings over his bride on the wedding day.

And that means that Jesus Christ is the horn of salvation and he is the music of the gospel and he is the music of ultimate deliverance. He is the great singer himself and he has come to sing over you this day to reconcile you to the living God for you to rest in the reality of the music of the gospel.

[25 : 20] Now we'll close finally with just briefly saying something about the power of the gospel. That's right, the power of music. There's also power in the gospel too. And for that reason, there's power in music.

If you believe on Jesus Christ today, there are some big promises implicit in this passage about what it means to make music to God because of the music of the gospel.

And I'm just going to quickly say four of them as we close. And the first one is this, it's just to review what we've already said. God made music, God sings over us, his people.

And so he calls us to respond to him in music. And what that simply means, and it's simple, but it's important to say this, that God loves to receive your worship by way of song.

God loves to hear you sing. God loves to hear your voice lifted up. And he receives that as a pleasant aroma of living sacrifice. He loves it. It glorifies God so much when you are satisfied in him enough to sing a song to him.

[26 : 32] That's the first thing. The second thing is this, another objective point. Not only that, we could take it even further. In Hebrews chapter two, Jesus Christ says this, I will sing a song in the midst of my brothers and sisters.

And so there's a promise in Hebrews two that when you sing a song to the Lord, Jesus Christ sings not only for you, but alongside of you, that you don't sing alone, that Jesus Christ sings songs of intercession alongside you as you lift up your voice to the living God.

That heaven is a soundscape where Christ the Redeemer is the chief singer, and he sings with you. He sings with us today as we sing songs and worship. Now those are both objective realities that we've got to lean into and heed and cherish and obey all at the same time, but there's, let me finish with two subjective realities as well, because music has both objective reality and immense subjective power.

And that's why God gives it to us. And the third is this, very simple, singing warms the heart.

Yesterday I flew to London early in the morning to pick up a vehicle that I'd purchased a van.

Someone in our congregation has been overly generous the last few weeks in loaning us her car, but I've got too many little children running around to fit them all into the car, and so we had to get something bigger.

[28 : 00] And so I went to London yesterday to pick up a vehicle and drove back, and I met a new friend, the dealer that sold me the car, and he was very kind and very generous, and he picked me up at the airport, and we drove to his dealership, and we had a great time, and he said he was going to join us online today for worship, so I hope he's doing that.

But I got to his dealership and I saw 50 cars or so sitting out in the lot, and I thought about this, it's winter, and when you have that many cars to deal with, you all know probably what happens when you let a car sit out in the freezing cold throughout winter, and if you never go out and you never crank it, what happens?

You come to the end of winter and it's been freezing, and you try to turn that car on and it just clicks, and it won't turn over, and the warmth of the engine will not fire, it won't trigger. I think perhaps many of us struggle in our day-to-day relationship with God and communing with the Lord day-to-day, we come to prayer in Scripture perhaps in the morning, and we feel like our prayers are hitting the ceiling and they're not going any farther than the dust on the curtains, and we're stale when we open the text and we're just getting through it.

Singing is like going out in the middle of winter and cranking up that engine so that when you really get going, it's warm and it's ready. Singing changes your heart, it warms your heart, and God says

in the Psalms, sing a new song to the Lord every morning.

Worship the Lord in song as part of your daily routine, your spiritual discipline of turning your heart back to the God of the Gospel every single day. There's real practical weight and value in that.

[29 : 41] Fourth and finally, Psalm 1 and Psalm 150 are the beginning and end of this book. And in Psalm 1 we're instructed to begin the Psalms by prayer, and in Psalm 150 they end with praise, with joyful praise.

Eugene Peterson, he says this about that. He says that the reason that the Psalms start with Psalm 1 and end with Psalm 150 is because all prayer pursued far enough becomes praise.

Any prayer, no matter how desperate its origin, no matter how angry and fearful the experiences it traverses, ends up eventually in praise.

It does not always get there quickly. It does not get there easily most of the time. The trip can take a lifetime, but every single prayer for somebody who rests in the Christ, who sings over them, will end in praise, in joyful praise.

It may take years, decades, even before certain specific prayers will arrive at the hallelujah of Psalm 150. Not every prayer is capped off with praise in our life.

[30 : 51] In fact, most prayers, if the Psalter is a true guide, do not end in praise. They end in pleads and lamentation and sorrow.

But prayer will always reach toward praise if Jesus Christ is your God, because death will become resurrection in the end. And so there's an ultimate unity to this great prayer book, this singing, this musical book that God has given us.

Make music today to the Christ, to the God of the Gospel that has come into this world because he wants to sing over you. And let's do that now.

Let's pray and then we'll sing. Father, we give thanks that you make music to us. And you sing over us as a bride restored to a bridegroom.

And so we come today to return songs to you, Lord, because they make much of your beauty in their beauty. And so we ask that you would lift up our hearts to you, our Lord, as we sing now this song.

[31 : 54] And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.