

Worship is Warfare

1 Samuel 16:14-23

Introduction

People of God, there is a saying in the CREC that we should try to get into our bones: worship is warfare. Of course warfare is also warfare. But the church has not been given the sword to fight against flesh and blood. Our battle is against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. And one of the ways the church wages this war is through musical worship.

I. The Departure of the Spirit and the Torment of Evil (vv. 14-16)

Last week we saw Samuel's ministry reach its climax as he anointed David with oil to be Israel's next king. With the oil came the Spirit, empowering him for godly rule. Saul too once received the Spirit when anointed, even becoming "a new man." Yet through his continual rejection of God's word, the Spirit departed from him, and an evil spirit from the Lord came to torment him.

Here we see the tragic consequence of persistent rebellion against God's word. When Saul repeatedly chose his own will over the Lord's commands, he fell out of harmony with heaven itself. The Spirit that once empowered Saul for righteous rule departed from him, leaving his soul vulnerable to the chaos and discord that evil spirits bring.

What was once ordered and harmonious in Saul's life became a cacophony of torment and madness.

This stands as a sobering reminder for all of us: continual rebellion against the Holy Spirit creates a kind of spiritual dissonance that invites the very spirits of chaos we were meant to resist.

But God's judgment upon Saul also prepared the way for His mercy. In His providence, the Lord had already anointed David—a man after God's own heart and whose heart was attuned to heaven's song, whose psalms would prove to be weapons against the very darkness that tormented Saul.

II. The Remedy of Music and the Character of David (vv. 17-19)

So Saul's servants suggested music as treatment for his torment. In the ancient world, music was not merely entertainment, but medicine for the soul—therapy against the discord and dissonance caused by the attacks of evil spirits.

According to a tradition beginning with Pythagoras, who lived in the 500's BC, and developed through Plato to Christian thinkers like Boethius, and even Johannes Kepler in the 17th century, there existed a threefold order

to music. This divine harmony was understood to flow from the cosmic music of the heavenly spheres, through the harmonious ordering of the human soul, and finally into the audible music of voices and instruments—creating a continuous chain linking earthly melodies to celestial order.

Musica Mundana: The Music of the Spheres

The first and highest form of music is Musica Mundana—the music of the spheres. The ancients spoke of this cosmic symphony that resounds through all of creation. They saw that music is built on simple, ordered relationships—ratios that make harmony possible.

An octave, a fifth, a fourth—all of them follow clear numerical patterns. And what they discovered is that these same patterns govern the heavens themselves.

The ancients believed that the planets, as they moved through the celestial spheres, created sounds based on their distances and speeds—each world contributing its own note to a cosmic symphony. Just as a harp string twice as long produces a note an octave lower, they taught that planets at different distances would sound intervals that corresponded to perfect musical ratios. The swift inner

planets would sing the higher notes, while the distant outer worlds provided the bass tones.

Together, all the wandering stars wove a celestial chord of perfect mathematical harmony—the same ratios that make earthly music beautiful. Octaves, fifths, and fourths resonated through the cosmos itself, creating an eternal song that only the soul could truly hear. The same mathematical relationships that give us beauty in music were believed to shape the very structure of the heavens.

Creation itself is built on harmony. The universe is ordered like a song—not metaphorically, but literally, with each celestial body playing its part in the grand composition that began at the moment of creation and continues until the end of time.

Medieval Christians like Boethius and Augustine saw in this the reflection of God's perfect order—a universe that operates according to divine mathematics and sings His praise. Dante envisioned the entire cosmos as a vast choral symphony, and Milton wrote of the "celestial symphony" in *Paradise Lost*.

They recognized that the created order is not chaotic but harmonic, a divine music echoing from the stars to the

human heart, all following the mathematical perfection of God's design.

Johannes Kepler, that great Christian astronomer, made some significant advancements to this theory. Rather than accepting the ancient belief that planets moved in perfect circles at constant speeds, Kepler discovered that planets follow elliptical orbits and speed up as they approach the sun, then slow down as they move away.

This revolutionary insight allowed him to find a more scientifically accurate version of celestial harmony. Instead of looking for simple ratios between different planets' orbital periods—which often didn't match the mathematical reality—Kepler found musical intervals within each individual planet's changing velocities.

As each world races faster at its closest approach to the sun and slows at its farthest point, the ratio between these maximum and minimum speeds creates precise musical harmonies: nearly perfect octaves, fifths, and fourths.

Through careful astronomical observation and mathematical calculation, Kepler preserved the ancient vision of cosmic music while grounding it in the actual mechanics of planetary motion that God had designed into creation.

He was so struck by this discovery that he wrote, "*The heavenly motions are nothing but a continuous song for several voices.*" He believed he had uncovered God's cosmic symphony—that the planets were making music as they moved according to these divine mathematical laws.

C.S. Lewis captured this truth of Music being at the very foundation of creation when he pictured Aslan singing Narnia into being. Tolkien also imagined the god Eru Ilúvatar teaching the Ainur music to sing the world into existence, only for Melkor to weave discord into the song—a discord that explains all the strife of Middle-earth. These tales echo the older Christian and classical tradition that creation itself is music, either in harmony with God or in discord against Him by rebellion.

The Bible hints at this in a number of places. We know that God spoke the universe into existence, but that divine speech itself is musical. In Job 38, we are told that when God laid the foundations of the earth, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Creation began with a harmonious song, with a chorus of voices in tune with the will of the Creator.

Psalm 19 declares, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge."

The heavens are not silent; they resound with a cosmic proclamation of God's glory.

And this cosmic song continues throughout all creation. Psalm 148 calls upon the entire universe to praise the Lord: "*Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens... Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created.*" From the celestial bodies to the weather patterns, from the mountains to the seas, from the wild beasts to the flying birds to Mankind—all creation participates in this celestial song of praise.

At the heart of this cosmic harmony stands the Trinity itself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect unity, three persons sharing one divine essence. This is the ultimate source of all harmony, the eternal music from which all creation's song proceeds. The Son, as the eternal Word, is the divine harmony made flesh, uniting heaven and earth in perfect consonance.

Musica Humana: The Music of the Soul

But the cosmic song calls for a response from human hearts, and this brings us to the second form of music: Musica Humana—the music of the human soul. This is the harmony that should exist within each person and between

people in community. When our souls are rightly ordered, aligned with God's will and filled with His Spirit, we become instruments in tune with the cosmic symphony.

Think of what happened to Saul. His torment by the evil spirit was not merely an external affliction—it was the sound of a soul out of tune, discordant notes echoing within him because he had fallen out of harmony with God's will. Sin creates dissonance within us. Pride, rebellion, envy, and lust, and not impenitence are like broken strings that cannot hold their proper pitch. When we persist in sin, our inner music becomes a cacophony that attracts the very spirits of discord and chaos.

David understood this deeply. When he sinned with Bathsheba and arranged Uriah's death, he felt the discord within his own soul. That's why he cried out for forgiveness in Psalm 51,

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me."

David knew that without the Spirit's presence, his soul would fall out of tune with heaven's harmony. He needed his inner music restored. He confessed his sins, and this is why he was a man after God's own heart.

But Musica Humana extends beyond individual souls to encompass how we live together as God's people. Boethius observed, *“Music is related...to morality as well, for nothing is more consistent with human nature than to be soothed by sweet modes or disturbed by their opposites. Thus we can begin to understand the apt doctrine of Plato, which holds that the whole Universe is united by musical concord.”*

When the church lives in unity, forgiveness, and love, we create a communal harmony that echoes the cosmic song and prepares us for our instrumental worship.

Paul makes this connection explicit in Colossians, exhorting God's people to live in harmony:

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony... Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." (Col. 3:12-16)

Notice the progression: first we tune our relationships through love, forgiveness, and kindness, and then we sing

together. The Spirit-filled Church is a singing Church, for the Spirit tunes our souls to God's perfect harmony. When our hearts are right with God and with one another, our voices naturally lift in praise. "*Song is almost nothing else other than spirit,*" said Boethius. When we love and forgive one another, we are being realigned with the eternal hymn of creation, joined to the harmony of the Holy Spirit.

This is why personal holiness and congregational unity matter so deeply for our worship. A church where people harbor grudges, nurse bitterness, or live in unrepentant sin will find its worship hollow and weak and ineffective against the powers of darkness. But when souls are in harmony with God and with each other, our combined voices become a powerful weapon against evil spirits.

III. The Power of Sacred Music in Spiritual Warfare (vv. 20-23)

This brings us to the third and most tangible form of music: *Musica Instrumentalis*—the actual sounds we make with our voices and instruments in worship. When David played his harp before Saul, something remarkable happened: "*Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.*" How do we understand the relationship between music and spirits?

Music as Spiritual Weapon

Here we must understand that *Musica Instrumentalis*, though the most earthly of the three forms of music, derives its power from its connection to the higher harmonies. When David's harp drove away the evil spirit, it was not mere melody that accomplished this, but melody aligned with heaven's song, played by a heart in tune with God, echoing the cosmic harmony that undergirds all creation.

The universe is never neutral—it is always ringing with battle songs. The faithful sons of God sing in harmony with their Creator, while the fallen ones howl in discord against Him. When we make music, we join one side or the other. If our song resonates with God's glory, it strengthens the soul, bringing us into alignment with heaven's hosts. But if we embrace the dissonance of Satan, we fall out of tune with God and are swept into the chaos of his rebellion.

The ancients felt the weight of this conflict, though they misunderstood it. They saw the stars, planets, and zodiac as signs of spiritual powers—what Paul calls principalities, powers, thrones, and dominions. Pagans lived in fear of these cosmic rulers, believing their lives and fates were chained to the movements of heavenly bodies. To shield

themselves from their evil forces, they turned to amulets, charms, spells, and idols.

But the Christian has no need of such defenses. Christ has shattered the dominion of those powers that once ruled from the heavenly places. As Paul declares, He is "*far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come*" (Ephesians 1:21). The very constellations and celestial thrones that pagans trembled before—those spiritual strongholds behind the zodiac and planetary influences—have been conquered by the Son of Man.

In His ascension, Christ didn't merely rise above these powers; He cast them down and seated redeemed humanity in their place. We who are in Christ now occupy those heavenly positions (Ephesians 2:6), and from those cosmic thrones we sing His praise in perfect harmony. The music of the spheres is no longer the domain of fallen principalities—it has become the worship song of the Church, proclaiming the glory of the One who rules over all creation.

This is why David's harp could drive away the evil spirit that tormented Saul. His psalms were not merely soothing melodies—they were weapons of cosmic warfare. Every note struck a blow against the spiritual darkness that claimed

dominion over the heavens. Every word proclaimed Yahweh's supremacy over the principalities and powers. The same authority still belongs to the Church. When we sing the psalms of David and the songs of Christ, we are not simply offering worship—we are exercising our heavenly authority, declaring from our seated position in the celestial places that the Lord of Hosts reigns, and commanding the powers of hell to flee before His name.

Martin Luther knew this well:

"Music is hateful and intolerable to the devil. I truly believe, and do not mind saying, that there is no art like music, next to theology. It is the only art, next to theology, that can calm the agitations of the soul, which plainly shows that the devil, the source of anxiety and sadness, flees from the sound of music as he does from religious worship."

That is why the Scriptures are full of psalms and hymns, in which praise is given to God. That is why, when we gather round God's throne in heaven, we shall sing His glory. Music is the perfect way to express our love and devotion to God. It is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us."

Now we can see how these three forms of music work together in our spiritual warfare. When we come to worship with souls in harmony (Musica Humana), aligned

with the cosmic song of creation (Musica Mundana), and lift our voices and instruments in psalms and hymns (Musica Instrumentalis), we are sounding a perfect triadic note that resonates with overwhelming power. We become part of God's orchestra, with different gifts creating one unified song that echoes from earth to heaven.

So, if you were wondering why our worship is filled with so much music, why we place such emphasis on learning how to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and why we teach our children to do the same, it is because when we sing, we join the cosmic choir of heaven and we take our stand against the powers of hell. Every voice matters. Every note strengthens your soul, resists the enemy, and rallies the armies of the Lord of Hosts.

Understanding these three levels of music should transform how we approach worship. We're not simply filling time with pleasant melodies, singing is not just pre-game warm up for the sermon—we're participating in cosmic and spiritual realities. We're aligning our earthly instruments and our hearts with the eternal song of heaven. We're taking our place in the great battle between harmony and discord, between the kingdom of light and the powers of darkness.

So when you come to worship, don't mumble through the hymns as though they were filler. Don't let the music wash past like background noise. Sing to the Lord with all your heart. Belt it out. And even if you struggle to find the right note—as I often do—don't worry about it. Find a note, and own that note. Make a holy ruckus that shakes the gates of hell. Sing as a soldier raising the anthem of his King. Sing as one who knows Christ has triumphed, and that the powers of darkness cannot prevail against His Church.

Conclusion

The same Spirit who strengthened David to drive away the darkness with the Psalms now dwells in you. When you lift your voice in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, you are wielding a weapon that draws its power from the very foundations of creation, flows through the harmony of redeemed souls, and finds expression in the instruments of worship. You are joining heaven's choir and standing in the battle line of the Lord of Hosts. Worship is warfare. So sing with faith. Sing with courage. Sing with joy. For Christ has triumphed, the devil trembles, and the powers of darkness flee before the song of God's people. Amen.