

1 Chronicles 15-16 “Worship in Song: the Beginning of Music in Christian Liturgy”
(September 25, 2011)

1 Chronicles 13-16 provides a *very* important lesson about worship.

As we saw last time, Uzzah died because he reached out his hand and touched the ark –
or, to put it in the terms that the Chronicler uses,
he died because the ark was being carried on a cart,
rather than by the priests.
He died because David and the priests failed to follow God’s rules for worship.

This passage demonstrates a principle that is sometimes called the “regulative principle”:
that in worship we must do only that which God has prescribed.

But this passage also demonstrates David’s creativity in worship.

In our passage today, David introduces musical instruments and song
into the worship of God.

But there is no reference in this passage (or elsewhere)
to any divine command to introduce music into worship.

What should we make of this?

Some have argued that this means
that we have similar freedom in worship as well.

But who is David?

It is one thing for the Lord’s anointed – the Messiah –
to introduce something.

But few mortals have ever stood where David stands.

Even Solomon will simply follow the pattern that Moses and David established.

And for that matter, David’s liturgical innovations
do not alter what Moses had said

(he discovered that the hard way in the case of Uzzah),
they simply expand on the pattern of Moses.

1. Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem: the Context of Liturgical Music (15:1-16:7)

a. “According to the Rule”: Preparing for the Ark (15:1-15)

¹David built houses for himself in the city of David. And he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. ²Then David said that no one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, for the LORD had chosen them to carry the ark of the LORD and to minister to him forever. ³And David assembled all Israel at Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the LORD to its place, which he had prepared for it. ⁴And David gathered together the sons of Aaron and the Levites: ⁵of the sons of Kohath, Uriel the chief, with 120 of his brothers; ⁶of the sons of Merari, Asaiah the chief, with 220 of his brothers; ⁷of the sons of Gershom, Joel the chief, with 130 of his brothers; ⁸of the sons of Elizaphan, Shemaiah the chief, with 200 of his brothers; ⁹of the sons of Hebron, Eliel the chief, with 80 of his

brothers; ¹⁰ of the sons of Uzziel, Amminadab the chief, with 112 of his brothers. ¹¹ Then David summoned the priests Zadok and Abiathar, and the Levites Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab, ¹² and said to them, "You are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites. Consecrate yourselves, you and your brothers, so that you may bring up the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel, to the place that I have prepared for it. ¹³ Because you did not carry it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule." ¹⁴ So the priests and the Levites consecrated themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel. ¹⁵ And the Levites carried the ark of God on their shoulders with the poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD.

Verses 1-15 lay out (in great detail) a very simple point – found in verse 13:
“because you did not carry [the ark] the first time,
the LORD our God broke out against us,
because we did not seek him according to the rule.”

It is not enough to “seek the LORD” –
you must seek the LORD – you must inquire of him –
according to the rules that he has established.

Notice the heavy stress on this rule in verse 2, verse 12, verse 13, verse 14, and verse 15.
The priests and Levites “consecrated themselves”
(which according to the law, indicates a sacrificial purification –
involving certain prescribed offerings to purify the priest for holy service)

Why is this important?
Because *worship* is the meeting of the Triune God with his covenant people.
If worship was just about “us” – then all that matters is what *we* think.

But worship is not all about “us” –
worship is about “us” coming into the presence of the Triune God!
When God breaks out against Israel, and strikes down Uzzah,
he is not being petty.
They are forgetting who *he is*.
He is holy.

When Israel tries to worship God, without obeying what God has said,
then they don't get *God* – they get death.

But then the Chronicler follows this emphasis on following the “ancient paths,”
with what I am calling...

b. A New Commandment: The Introduction of Musical Instruments (15:16-24)

¹⁶ David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise

sounds of joy. ¹⁷So the Levites appointed Heman the son of Joel; and of his brothers Asaph the son of Berechiah; and of the sons of Merari, their brothers, Ethan the son of Kushaiah; ¹⁸and with them their brothers of the second order, Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, and Mikneiah, and the gatekeepers Obed-edom and Jeiel. ¹⁹The singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were to sound bronze cymbals; ²⁰Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah were to play harps according to Alamothe; ²¹but Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel, and Azaziah were to lead with lyres according to the Sheminith. ²²Chenaniah, leader of the Levites in music, should direct the music, for he understood it. ²³Berechiah and Elkanah were to be gatekeepers for the ark. ²⁴Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer, the priests, should blow the trumpets before the ark of God. Obed-edom and Jehiah were to be gatekeepers for the ark.

The reason why I call this a “new commandment” is because there is nothing in Moses that indicates that music had any place at the tabernacle – and in all the descriptions of the work of the Levites in the Law, there is nothing about singing or making music.

But upon David’s command, the Levites appoint Heman, Asaph and Ethan as the three leaders of the singing – who were also to sound the cymbals; while others would join them on harps and lyres. Chenaniah is referred to as the “leader of the Levites in music” – and he is placed as director, since he understood it.

You definitely want someone who knows what he is doing to lead the music!

And then the priests would blow the trumpets. Trumpets, in those days, were not really “ensemble instruments” – they were more used for summoning people to battle (or to worship). If, in the middle of the music, someone is blowing a trumpet, that is designed to communicate a victory cry (or possibly a warning)!

In every ancient culture that used horns, everyone knew the difference between the battle cry and the retreat.

But at the moment, all of these arrangements are purely temporary. All of this is designed for the transportation of the ark over the last few miles from the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem.

Indeed, one could argue that David is merely imitating Moses at this point. Just as Moses had celebrated the victory of God over the Egyptians at the Red Sea by singing the Song of Moses – with Miriam and the women playing the tambourines and singing the refrain – so now David is celebrating the victory of God over the Philistines, and the establishment of God’s Kingdom in Jerusalem.

At least here at the end of chapter 15,
all we see is a temporary arrangement for musical celebration.

c. The Coming of the Ark to Jerusalem (15:25-16:3)

²⁵ So David and the elders of Israel and the commanders of thousands went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the house of Obed-edom with rejoicing. ²⁶ And because God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams.

Notice that this time they sacrificed to the LORD – 7 bulls and 7 rams.

While the first assembly paid lip service to the presence of the LORD
when they brought up the ark from Kiriath-jearim,
this time they take the presence of the LORD very seriously!

At the end of Job, God tells Job to offer 7 bulls and 7 rams
as an atonement for his three foolish friends.

Likewise, Hezekiah will offer 7 bulls, 7 rams, 7 males goats, and 7 lambs
as a sin offering during his restoration of worship in 2 Chronicles 29.

But here, this is not said to be a burnt offering, or a sin offering,
but they are “sacrificed” – which almost always refers to the peace offering.
And the context here of rejoicing does not permit the more somber interpretation.
“Because God helped the Levites” they sacrificed the bulls and rams.

Remember that the priests and Levites had already consecrated themselves.
They have offered the prescribed offerings – and now
because God was pleased with their worship,
they bring sacrifices of praise and rejoicing to him.

²⁷ David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, as also were all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and the singers and Chenaniah the leader of the music of the singers. And David wore a linen ephod. ²⁸ So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres.

David and the Levites are all wearing fine linen –
and David also wears a linen ephod.
Notice that the king has a quasi-priestly role here.

In Moses’ day, the emphasis was on Aaron, the high priest.
But in those days there was no king in Israel.
God ruled Israel directly.

But as you see in the book of Judges,

Israel failed to live like the Son of God.
Israel rejected God as king over them (as God says in 1 Samuel).
And so Israel needs a king who will become all that Israel has failed to be –
so that Israel can finally become what Israel is supposed to be!

That is why the Chronicler keeps emphasizing how “all Israel”
came together to bring the ark of the LORD to city of David.

The point of the kingdom of David is not for the good of David and his house.
The point of the kingdom of David is the good of all Israel.

²⁹And as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came to the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David dancing and rejoicing, and she despised him in her heart.

Samuel says more about this episode.
The Chronicler takes one sentence –
with a very clear result:

there are some in the house of Saul who are out of tune with what God is doing.

Indeed, if all you had was the Chronicler’s account,
you would not even know that Michal was David’s wife!

He assumes that you know this –
but it is not relevant to his story.

¹And they brought in the ark of God and set it inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. ²And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD ³and distributed to all Israel, both men and women, to each a loaf of bread, a portion of meat, ^[b] and a cake of raisins.

The first three verses of chapter 16 conclude the narrative of how the ark came to David.
And when the ark is brought to the tent that David had pitched for it,
they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings
(this is the standard language for a worship service – the ordinary liturgy –
from Leviticus)
And then David blesses the people in the name of the LORD –
something that the high priest was supposed to do in Numbers 6.

If God had commanded the priests to bless,
why is David blessing the people?
Again, in Moses’ day there was no king.
And David is the LORD’s anointed (like the priest is the LORD’s anointed).

Even as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in their own day,
so now David has authority to bless all Israel.

He is not a priest, per se,
but he does have a priestly aspect to his character.

[If you think about it, pastors today are in a similar situation;
we are not “priests” in the strict sense of the word,
but we do have (as Paul calls it in Romans 15) a “priestly ministry.”]

And so David distributes to all Israel
bread, meat (from the sacrifice), and raisins,
so that all Israel can partake of the sacrifice,
and rejoice together in the covenant meal with their God.

d. The Levitical Singers (16:4-7)

⁴Then he appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the LORD, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel. ⁵Asaph was the chief, and second to him were Zechariah, Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom, and Jeiel, who were to play harps and lyres; Asaph was to sound the cymbals, ⁶and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God. ⁷Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the LORD by Asaph and his brothers.

So far, everything has been oriented on the special event of the day –
bringing the ark to Jerusalem.

Verses 4-7 then turn to the *regular* worship of God.

The purpose of the Levitical Singers and musicians
was to “invoke, thank, and praise the LORD, the God of Israel.”

The first word means “to cause to be remembered,”
or “to commemorate.”

The basic idea seems to be that David was concerned that Israel had forgotten the LORD.

The ESV translates these three words as though they are all about speaking to God.

But in light of the occasion, I would suggest that David’s concern is both
for the vertical (to give praise to God)
and the horizontal (to cause the LORD to be remembered).

And when you look at the song that David gives them to sing,
you can see both aspects.

2. The Content of Liturgical Song (16:8-36) [Psalms 105 and 96]

**a. Give Thanks to the LORD for His Wondrous Works for Our Fathers
(v8-22)**

Verses 8-22 are virtually identical to Psalm 105:1-15

- ⁸ *Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!*
⁹ *Sing to him; sing praises to him;
tell of all his wondrous works!*
¹⁰ *Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!*
¹¹ *Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually!*
¹² *Remember the wondrous works that he has done,
his miracles and the judgments he uttered,*
¹³ *O offspring of Israel his servant,
sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!*

The theme of these verses fits perfectly with what the Chronicler is saying about worship.

The musical service should praise the LORD
and cause him to be remembered!

Notice that the song is addressed to the people of God:

it is a “call to worship” – recounting the wondrous works of God.

Sing to the LORD – sing praises to him – tell of all his wondrous works.

The emphasis – as the Chronicler has told us –
is all about “remembering.”

Israel’s problem – indeed, *our problem* – is forgetfulness.

We haven’t seen God’s mighty deeds with our own eyes.

And even if we have? We are like our fathers, and we forget them!

But it’s not merely an intellectual remembering.

The reason why you remember is not because you need to know some facts.

The reason why you remember is because of *who God is*:

“Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!”

You are to pursue him – and not merely because of what he has done in the past.

After all,

- ¹⁴ *He is the LORD our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.*
¹⁵ *Remember his covenant forever, [here there is a twist – you must remember]
the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,*
¹⁶ *the covenant that he made with Abraham,*

*his sworn promise to Isaac,
17 which he confirmed as a statute to Jacob,
as an everlasting covenant to Israel,
18 saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan,
as your portion for an inheritance."*

You must remember the covenant (God certainly will!)
because God has promised and he is faithful.
He will not forsake the covenant that he made with Abraham.

And verses 19-22 remind us of one specific instance of that.

*19 When you were few in number,
and of little account, and sojourners in it,
20 wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people,
21 he allowed no one to oppress them;
he rebuked kings on their account,
22 saying, "Touch not my anointed ones,
do my prophets no harm!"*

David says that one of the purposes of music in worship
is to cause God (and his mighty deeds) to be remembered.

If you just think of worship music in terms of "praising God"
then what we do at Michiana Covenant makes little sense.

I pay pretty close attention to what we sing,
and every Sunday, at least one or two songs are selected
to cause the LORD and his mighty deeds to be remembered.

b. Sing to the LORD for His Marvelous Works among All Peoples (v23-36)

Verses 23-36 use Psalm 96 to expand the point.

We do not sing only of God's purposes for Israel –
but of God's purposes for all nations.

God's purpose is to bring salvation to the nations *through Israel*.
I know that ever since Isaac Watts, some people have said
that we should "Christianize" the OT songs
in order to make explicit reference to Christ.
I don't object to *some of that*.

But my observation is that it is better to teach the people of God
to remember the mighty deeds of God and how they all come together
in the person and work of Christ,

so that they might see the glory of Christ in every mighty deed.

Verses 23-27 urge us to sing to the LORD – and tell of his salvation from day to day.

- ²³ *Sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Tell of his salvation from day to day.*
- ²⁴ *Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!*
- ²⁵ *For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
and he is to be held in awe above all gods.*
- ²⁶ *For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.*
- ²⁷ *Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and joy are in his place.*

Verse 26 emphasizes that the LORD is creator of the heavens.

Verse 33 adds that he is the judge of all the earth.

- ²⁸ *Ascribe to the LORD, O clans of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!*
- ²⁹ *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come before him!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;^[c]*
- ³⁰ *tremble before him, all the earth;
yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved.*
- ³¹ *Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice,
and let them say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!"*
- ³² *Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it!*
- ³³ *Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.*
- ³⁴ *Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!*

All peoples – indeed, all creatures – are to worship the LORD and tremble before him.

And in our singing, we not only praise God for his goodness –

but we also exhort one another – and all creatures –

to give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Verses 35-36 adds:

- ³⁵ *Say also:
"Save us, O God of our salvation,
and gather and deliver us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name,
and glory in your praise.*

³⁶ *Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!"*

Then all the people said, "Amen!" and praised the LORD.

There is some question as to whether verse 35 was the Chronicler's own addition
(it is not found in Psalm 105 or Psalm 96 –
and verse 36 comes from the end of Psalm 106)

Indeed, the "say also" at the beginning of verse 35
may suggest that this is the Chronicler's own insertion,
urging his readers to add their own petition as they sing Israel's song.

We are not limited to just using "the words they used back then"
(though I would point out that the Chronicler uses nearly 30 verses
from "back then" and adds one of his own!)

So the Chronicler uses *mostly* 700 year old songs
in order to communicate what the people in his day need to hear.

The solution to our problem is nothing new.
Our problem is that we have been forgetful.
We have turned aside from worshiping the LORD our God,
and we have not sought after him with our whole heart.

3. Conclusion: The Ark in Jerusalem and the Tabernacle at the High Place (16:37-42)

³⁷*So David left Asaph and his brothers there before the ark of the covenant of the LORD to minister regularly before the ark as each day required,* ³⁸*and also Obed-edom and his^[d] sixty-eight brothers, while Obed-edom, the son of Jeduthun, and Hosah were to be gatekeepers.* ³⁹*And he left Zadok the priest and his brothers the priests before the tabernacle of the LORD in the high place that was at Gibeon* ⁴⁰*to offer burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of burnt offering regularly morning and evening, to do all that is written in the Law of the LORD that he commanded Israel.* ⁴¹*With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and expressly named to give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever.* ⁴²*Heman and Jeduthun had trumpets and cymbals for the music and instruments for sacred song. The sons of Jeduthun were appointed to the gate.*

⁴³ *Then all the people departed each to his house, and David went home to bless his household.*

Verses 37-42 then describe the temporary split in Israel's worship.
Asaph and his brothers were left before the ark –
"to minister regularly before the ark as each day required."

While Zadok the priest and Heman and Jeduthun remained at Gibeon,
at the high place where the tabernacle was located,
where the altar of burnt offering also remained.

There are some interesting questions!

If Zadok is operating according to the Law of the LORD (v40),
then what does he do on the Day of Atonement,
when he is supposed to go into the Holy of Holies?
The ark of the covenant is no longer *in* the Holy of Holies!

The name of the LORD no longer dwells in the most Holy Place.

As we'll see next time, in chapter 17,
this creates a problem for David
(though God points out to him, this is not a problem for God!)

But one thing it does suggest
is that the ark of the covenant is not *essential* for the operation of the tabernacle.

Why is that important?

Because in the Chronicler's day –
the ark of the covenant is *not* in the temple!
Did the Babylonians capture it?
Did the Assyrians take it?
Or did the priests hide it in a cave for fear it might be captured?

The Chronicler will not solve for us the mystery of the lost ark,
but he will point out that in David's day, the ark and the tabernacle were separated
without any resulting difficulty for the liturgy of Israel.

Of course, all this comes back together again in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And through his blood, we come into the presence of the Triune God
where we commemorate his mighty deeds,
and give thanks to the Father for his wondrous works,
whereby he has delivered the nations through the resurrection of his Son,
applied to us by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.