

Faith Pulpit

David's Musical Therapy, I Samuel 16:14-23, Part 2

In part one we looked at three topics relating to 1 Samuel 16:14–23: The problem of evil, the identity of the evil spirit, and the solution for King Saul's affliction. In this article, we will investigate the ability of David's music to bring about a two-fold deliverance for King Saul's affliction, but, first, some interpretive issues are appropriate to consider. A number of commentaries say that David's music had little if anything to do with Saul's recovery; this interpretation, however, ignores the language employed by Samuel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The preposition attached to the beginning of the second sentence in verse 23 promotes the idea that "one action caused a reaction." David played his harp and then Saul felt better. Even laying aside other conservative, literal interpretive tendencies, one would surmise that Samuel intended to narrate how David's music benefited Saul.

The Cure for King Saul's Affliction: Spiritual Deliverance

The cure for Saul's affliction came through David's music, and it was two-fold. First, Saul benefited from temporary spiritual deliverance. Whatever one believes concerning the identity and/or scope of the "evil, distressing spirit," this much is clear: the music had the power to cause the spirit to depart from Saul. The implications here are important for the discussion of the morality of music because the ability of David's music to interrupt spiritual oppression qualifies its moral substance. The text is not implying, by any stretch of the imagination, that music has the power to deliver men from their sin. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ contains that atoning power (cf. John 14:6; Ephesians 2:8–10). The point here is that the music created by David evidenced the unique ability to either directly remove the distressing spirit or indirectly create an atmosphere whereby the spirit could no longer distress Saul. Both possibilities direct us to the same conclusion. The elements of David's music were able to render the spirit unable or unwilling to continue its oppression of Saul. One must not relegate to obscurity this representation of music's power. The Chinese philosopher Confucius said, "If one should desire to know whether a kingdom is well governed, if its morals are good or bad, the quality of its music will

furnish the answer.” David Tame said, “Because of the power for good or evil inherent within the tonal arts, the moral effect of music was considered so important by the Chinese as to rank as the most important test of a music’s worth.”¹

On a side note, the musical abilities of man made in the image of God, coupled with the Bible’s teaching that God sings (Zephaniah 3:17), remind us of the possibility that God did not create music but rather that music is a part of His very being. Man’s expression in music could be a part of the image of God placed within him. This author believes that music is a part of God’s essence and that He has evidenced this aspect of His being in the universe.² The current debate within Christianity concerning music certainly invites further study and writing among theologians. The implications of such a study would yield valuable information for the application of music both in the church and in the individual Christian life.

The Cure for King Saul’s Affliction: Physical Deliverance

Second in this two-fold cure, Saul benefited from temporary physical deliverance. The word used here is *ravach*, which means “to be spacious or wide, cause enlargement, relief.”³ It may also contain the idea of feeling relieved.⁴ This word is also used in Job 32:20 where Job seeks relief from terrible abdominal pain. The word signifies that Saul’s body felt complete relief from the affliction. Medical research has proven that the right kind of music can speed physical healing in war casualties.⁵ A writer points out the similarity of this Hebrew word with the word translated “spirit, wind, breath” and believes that Saul’s affliction may have included difficulty in breathing.⁶ David’s music was powerful enough to bring about temporary, complete physical relief from the severe agony that Saul was experiencing. Some have used Saul’s murderous treachery in Chapters 18 and 19 to argue that the music could not help Saul. The context of these two examples is key to answering this objection. One must remember that David had become a national hero by slaying Goliath in Chapter 17. King Saul had promoted David from a lowly shepherd to the King’s royal armor-bearer, and now the nation of Israel had fallen in love with David! This irony was not lost on Saul, and the people singing “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” only fed his resentment toward David. David’s political popularity created deep hatred within the heart of Saul, and he was now determined to murder David. The text indicates that David’s music had refreshed Saul previously on numerous occasions; it says that whenever the distressing spirit would come upon Saul, he would call for David to come and play, and only then would the spirit depart. Saul’s physical deliverance is emphasized clearly in the Hebrew language: the music made him well.

Conclusion

Christians must be alert to music’s power to affect the mind. The wrong kind of music has the ability to affect the listener’s mind in a negative way. Composers do not create their music in a vacuum. They are often attempting to communicate thoughts, emotions, and ideas foundational to their worldview.

When those concepts are in opposition to God's Word and His plan, the Christian must decide to separate from that music. The world's rock-n-roll music communicates confusion, disorder, sensuality, and rebellion from authority; yet many churches say they are using it to reach out to the lost. Churches that use rock music are reinforcing the worldview of a pagan society and creating confusion in the minds of believers and unbelievers alike. Christians are to be different and distinct from the world, and their music is no exception. The apostle Paul exhorts believers to "be renewed in the spirit of your mind" in Ephesians 4:23. God expects Christians to think differently from the lost world in which they live, so that He may accomplish His will in their lives. Reinforcing worldly concepts with rock music only hinders the believer's ability to renew his thinking in conformity with the Scriptures.

The most influential Italian philosopher of the Renaissance, Giovanni Mirandola, said, "Music produces like effects on the mind as good medicine on the body." For years, studies have shown that the right kind of music has the power to relieve mental suffering.² Music that contains elements consistent with the fruits of the Spirit such as goodness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23) can communicate those concepts to the listener. Music is ultimately a spiritual issue. 1 Samuel 16:14–23 communicates that good music has power to relieve spiritual and physical suffering. The text states that, when David would play his lyre, the spirit would depart from Saul. David's music, therefore, was responsible for Saul's relief. It is clear that a complete theology of music is impossible to formulate from this single text. Developing a systematic theology of music from the Scriptures and other relevant sources by careful application of doctrines relating to music and the Christian life, however, is both possible and necessary. Music is moral, with the ability to communicate good/evil ideas, thoughts, and concepts. This idea has been accepted to be true by a profound majority of musicians, theologians, philosophers, leaders, and civilizations throughout the history of mankind. In fact, in my research, I found it difficult to find a source that reacts negatively to this assertion. Those questioning the morality of music in our culture are predominantly Christians in recent years. God's children must exercise discernment and wisdom in making musical choices, and any philosophy of music that recklessly abandons all Scriptural application is spiritually and biblically unacceptable. The current debate in Christianity regarding the role, use, and morality of music necessitates further study and writing within systematic theology. Finally, 2 Peter 1:3,4 teaches us that God has given the Christian everything necessary to live a godly life that pleases Him: "According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue, Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." The subject of music is not exempt from the scrutiny of the Scriptures, and those who hold to the inspiration and authority of the Bible must apply the principles of God's Word to their music as consistently as they would to any other subject.

Works Cited

1. Tame, The Secret Power of Music, 35.
2. Ibid, 237. When Voyager 2 drew close to the ringed world it picked up the whines and hisses of the magnetosphere and beamed them back to earth. These were then speeded up and played through a music synthesizer, and the waves were indeed found to consist of a kind of melody.
3. Brown, Driver, Briggs, The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, 926.
4. Willem A. VanGemeren, Editor, The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, Volume 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 1070.
5. Jay T. Wright, Ph.D., "About the Music Research Foundation," Music and Your Emotions (New York: Liveright, 1952), 88. Research at Walter Reed Hospital over 3 years showed that WWII U.S. Army soldiers made outstanding improvements with music therapy.
6. Klein, Word Biblical Commentary, 1 Samuel, 167.
7. Leonard Gilman, M.D., "Music As a Psychotherapeutic Agent," The Journal of Clinical Psychopathology, Volume 10, no. 3 (Washington Institute of Medicine, July 1949).

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