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*The Music in Hell*  
*Acts 17*  
*October 17, 1999*

Several years ago when we used to have our offices in the back of the church, at about 4 o'clock on a Friday, I was the only one around and I heard a noise out in the hallway. So, I walked out into the hallway which was back here then, and I found this young man. He was standing there with just wild hair and wild eyes; and yet the eyes were dull. And his clothes were wild; they were all disheveled and confused. In fact, he wasn't wearing any pants. Thank the Lord, he was wearing long underwear.

So I said, "Can I help you?" And he said, "Well, a pair of pants would be nice."

And I said, "Gosh, what happened?"

He looked at me in utter seriousness and said, "Do you want the truth or do you want a lie?"

I said, "Well, okay; go with the truth; let's try the truth; let's try that one."

He said, "Well, I drove out here from Michigan and I had a religious experience. So I parked my car up here on the side of Lookout Mountain Road, took off all my clothes and ran around in the woods for two days. You know how it is."

I said, "Well, kind of, I guess." It's not your normal kind of Presbyterian liturgy.

He said, "Well, when I got back to the car, someone had taken my pants with my keys and I'm locked out of the car."

I said, "Well, gosh; what can we do for you?"

He said, "I told you -- a pair of pants would be nice."

I was beginning to realize, at this point, that this man's universe and my universe were not really the same and that we had a little bit of trouble communicating. But I wanted to help him, so I got him into my car and we drove over to the Evergreen Outreach and got him a pair of pants and a pair of shoes. That was really all he wanted.

As we drove back in the car – there were still all kinds of problems – how he was going to get into his car, where he was going to go – I was asking him all of these questions. But there was no logic, no reason there. Finally, I thought maybe I'd be able to connect with him by offering him money, because he was just staring off into space. I said, "Would you like some money? Could we give you some money?"

Then he turned, looked at me and said, "Shhh! You ask too many questions."

At that, I realized that my attempts at relationship were probably over, so I dropped him off at his car, not knowing what he'd do or where he'd go or who he was. In one sense, he was so free that he defined his own truth, his own reality. In that sense, he was like God. And yet when I dropped him off, it felt like I dropped him off in hell. I do not know if

he was mentally ill, if he was demonized, if he was on some kind of drug that I couldn't perceive, but I do know that there was no logic connecting his world and my world, so there could be no dialogue between us, no communication. He was alone, cut off. "You ask too many questions."

That's the word of the enemy. Turn off the lights; close the door; stop thinking; stop asking. It's easier not to think, to embrace the darkness. I tell you there was no music in this man's eyes.

*And as the flames climbed high into the night  
to light the sacrificial rite,  
I saw Satan laughing with delight  
the day the music died.*

Don McClean sings it on American Pie. And that other line

*And the three men I admire most,  
The Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost,  
They caught the last train for the coast,  
the day the music died.*

What do we like music? Have you ever thought about that? What is music? Basically, music is math and logic, and there's something in us that recognizes the reason, the rhyme, the harmony in compression waves within the atmosphere. Music is constructed around notes, like middle C for instance, that's true, that's in tune. In physics, middle C is a specific harmonic oscillation. People didn't invent middle C; they discovered middle C, or it discovered them. It's built into the fabric of the universe. And other notes that men did not invent are brought into harmonies, logical relationships with that note. Harmonies are the mathematics of whole numbers brought together.

When you appreciate music, you appreciate math; you appreciate reason; you appreciate truth; you appreciate logic on an intuitive level. In fact, a symphony is a plethora of harmonies, notes, instruments, chords, all built around a conductor who takes a tuning fork, strikes middle C for instance, and all the instruments come into harmony, come true to middle C. And that is not bondage; that is freedom. For in tune, all those instruments, all those notes can play an infinite variety of music from Bruce Springsteen to the Moody Blues to Beethoven's Third Symphony, but it's all music, for it is all built logically on middle C, true to middle C.

And yet, if one little violinist in the symphony says, "You know, I'm kind of sick of tuning my violin; I'm kind of sick of tuning it to middle C. I don't even know if there is a middle C. God, I'm going to tune my violin as I darn well see fit." You know the human ear can recognize just one note out of discord with the symphony, and it will infect the entire symphony, and it will become a fallen symphony, fallen from music into noise.

*I saw Satan laughing with delight  
the day the music died.*

Why are we attracted to music? Because God is true and we are made in the image of that God, and music is logic, is reason, is relationships of truth. So why was there no music in the man's eyes who did wear pants? Because he was illogical, unreasonable;

he was out of tune with reality itself. He was a noise, utterly alone, refusing harmony, no music. Or should I say no joy, no peace, no life, no kindness, no goodness, no music? Logical relationships of truth – life, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness – all that stuff is also logical relationships of truth, a perfected harmony that the Hebrews called *Shalom* which is translated *peace*.

A symphony is a celebration of *shalom*, truth, logic, on a very deep, deep level. This world was created to be a symphony of relationships where one sound, one instrument cared about the next instrument because it cared about the entire symphony, and that caring is called *love*. It's called *love*. Surrender of a note to the entire symphony. This world was to be that symphony, between people and God, people and middle C, between people and people, one instrument caring for the next instrument out of love for the entire symphony.

It's that created memory within us that allows for music at all, that allows for art, that allows us to have a concept of beauty, that created memory within, a thirst for harmony, righteousness, truth. And yet just one piece of that symphony rebelled at the instigation of the tempter, the one that Jesus called the father of lies. He said to the man and the woman, "Hey. Why don't you take the fruit – because you know what? You'll be like God; you'll be middle C. Everything will have to be tuned to you; you'll determine reality, your own reality, like God." Just like the man with no pants.

So now, we live in a symphony out of tune, a world in discord. To be finally separated from the symphony is hell. One note discordantly braying alone in the dark forever, refusing harmony. And that, I think, is why the man with no pants seemed like he was already in hell. Now, I want you to listen to me very closely. I know that God will redeem the minds of Christians who go insane, just as He redeems bodies, and they become full and true. Things happen and people get mentally ill who love Jesus, and Jesus loves His children very much, and He will redeem them, given them their right mind.

But, you see, this madness that I'm talking about – hell – is a chosen madness, the chosen madness of isolation and rebellion against truth. And the word for that choice is *sin*, and we're all infected with it, out of dialog with the symphony, longing for the symphony. And get this, we've already played discordant notes; our life is a discordant note, and we can't harmonize ourselves.

But when we receive Jesus, we receive a higher logic, a higher theme, a more beautiful theme. And He is the one Who comes and harmonizes us, weaves us into the greatest and most glorious thing of all called redemption, grace. But this world, I think, really is a choice, not a logical deduction at its core, because it's about the logic itself. It's choice, and the choice is this; do you like the music, or would you rather play your one note alone in the dark, arrogantly braying forever?

This morning I want you to at least see this; that just as atmosphere is the very medium of sound, for there is no sound in space, in the same way, truth is the very medium of relationships. So there are no real relationships in hell, no dialog, and in the same way, logic is the very medium of dialog, communication. In fact, you know that word *dialog* is English comes from a Greek word *dialogomi* which is two Greek words put together. *Dia*, meaning *according to or through*, and *logos* meaning *word*, reason, truth. *Dialogos*, according to the *logos*, and in Greek *logos* is reason, connection, meaning.

And that makes some sense to me that they had one word for that because I remember as a father when my children were younger, how I waited and waited for the day when my babies would say a word. Because when they began to speak, their world became connected to my world. It's different for moms; they have the umbilical cord thing going on; but dad, he hovers over the baby going, "Say da-da; say da-da!," sending words to that baby. "Come on – say da-da;" or in Aramaic, "Abba! Say it!" And you know what? Our Father, God in heaven, sent His Word into our world so that you and I would say, "Abba!"

When we cry "Abba," it is our spirit bearing witness with His Spirit *that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs*. We are connected; His world with our world. And how He must long, how He must wait, sending His Word into our world. And His Word says, *Come, let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they'll be white as snow*. "I forgive you; say Abba! Say it!" Music to His ears, born again into His world; His symphony; His kingdom.

And so, of course, Satan hates music, hates logic, hates dialogic, hates reason, hates Word. Satan is our enemy and we battle him for the souls of people who do not hear the music.

In the last chapter of Acts, we saw how Paul and Silas invaded Europe. They sang a song in a Philippian jail in that cold, dark, painful place. They sang a song and the walls came tumbling down. But if you read Scripture closely, you realize that they'd been in town for several weeks before they sang the song, probably about three weeks or so. What were they doing? What would they do when they would go to a town?

Acts 17, verse 1

*Now when they had passed Amphipolis and Appollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and arise from the dead (a pretty glorious theme!) and saying, 'This Jesus Who I proclaim to you is the Christ.'*

For three weeks, as was his custom, Paul went in and he argued, he reasoned; the verb in Greek is *dialogomi*, dialogue. In verse 10, in Berea, he does the same thing. In verse 17, in Athens, he does the same thing – dialoging, reasoning with them from the Scriptures. He'd reason from the Scriptures with the Jews, and then he'd reason from creation with the Greeks – science. He will do this in Corinth and Ephesus, in Troas, in prison before Felix, this verb appearing in each one of those places. It was what Paul did, his custom, his practice.

And he wrote, *We are transformed by the renewal of our minds*. And we are to *gird our loins*, prepare for battle with truth. And be open to reason, he wrote, *The weapons of our warfare are not worldly. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God. Study to show yourself approved, Timothy*, he wrote.

And Peter wrote this, *Always be prepared to make an apologia*, an apologos about the Logos, a reasoned defense *for the hope that is within you*. And Jesus said in a very important place, *Love the Lord your God with all your mind*, all of it.

Recently a story has been circulating on the internet about a professor at USC in a class that he has, and his practice of trying to destroy the faith of freshman students in his class. And at the end of the class, he has anybody who is still a believer stand up and nobody ever stands up. The story I read a couple years ago that was going all over the internet was that there was one student who got into his class and every morning he would get up for three months and pray, "God, please help me to have the courage to stand up at the end class and confess my faith in you." The day finally came when the professor stood up and said, "Now are there any of you out there that still believe in God?" And this young man stood up; and everybody looked at him in shock; 300 students and the professor. The professor collected himself and said, "You fool! If there was a God, I could take this chalk and drop it and He could keep it from breaking." So he took a piece of chalk, held it up, let go, the chalk hit the cuff of his sleeve, rolled down his shirt, into the pleat of his pants, off his shoe, rolled right onto the floor, unbroken. And the professor looked at the chalk, looked at the young man and ran out of the lecture hall. The young man walked down the steps and shared his faith with those 300 students, told them how Jesus loved them and died for them.

I read it and I thought, "Wow!" Now, please understand, I believe that God is completely capable and may, I don't know, very often stop chalk from breaking. But I wrote, "How sad! How very sad, that there was not one student among all those students with the mind, the brains and devoted enough to Jesus to stand up and argue this really stupid premise. Because you know what? I don't think Paul would have waited for the chalk to drop; I think he would have stood up and said, "What are you suggesting? That's ridiculous! Are you saying that unless the God of all reality submits to your stupid little chalk test, He doesn't exist? You fool! Who do you think you are – God? We don't measure God; God measures us. We don't test God; God tests us. You act like you're middle C, the middle of all reality;" kind of like the man with no pants. "Who do you think you are?" How sad that there was no one to argue, to dialog, for you see, maybe the chalk didn't break, but they still would have believed a lie and that is that man/woman measures God. That's insane; that's the insanity of secular humanism, and Satan infects the church with it and everything relative to you, your middle C.

So at church we can hear things like this, "Well, you know truth really is rather relative. So be true to yourself. You know, really all faiths are basically equal. There's no absolute truth, reason, logic, word." That's the liberal church, and in the conservative church, he just whispers, "You ask too many questions. Just have faith, because it's not about logic; just have faith. Faith is believe what you really *know* isn't true. Don't use your mind. Don't use your intellect." Anti-intellectualism in church; anti-logic sounds like this, for instance. "Well, God said it; I believe it; that settles it."

Help me here. How do you know God had said it? "I just know. I have faith; it's about faith; you're asking too many questions; you're thinking too much; stop asking all these questions and have faith." End of dialog.

A few weeks ago, I read an article about the way societies create myths. Its chief example was the story of the professor with the chalk. This guy had traced it down and it seems there never was a class like that at USC. No one had even a vague memory of an event like that. More than likely, some energetic and enthusiastic believers, kind of - you know how we can do this – kind of made it up in order to help God out. Kind of like when you're trying to slay someone in the Spirit and they won't go down, well, just give

them a little push and act like it was God – hallelujah! Because of the belief that faith is kind of like closing your eyes saying “Jesus” a whole lot and hoping, making believe.

But you see there’s another word for that, and the word is this – lying. Satan is the father of lies and faith, real faith in God, is never lying, and it is never irrational. Faith is the most logical decision that you could ever make, because you see, it means trusting the revealed logic and wisdom of God more than your own piddly little experience. It’s leaning not on your own understanding, but leaning on His understanding. That’s entirely reasonable.

Faith; you exercise it every time you go to the doctor. You’re trusting that the doctor knows more about your small intestines than you do. That is not irrational; that’s highly rational. God is not illogical. Listen to me; this is it; God is more logical than we have ever begun to even imagine.

So I believe it is Satan’s strategy to get Jesus on the cover of the weekly *World News* every week. Why? Because if he does that, then we, the Church, we look like the man with no pants who will not and cannot dialog. So the world looks at us and says, “Go ahead! Have your religious experience; run around the woods!” No; I don’t know how it is and I don’t necessarily care to. And you see the wiles of the devil? One side of us – the Church – claims to be intellectual, logical, by saying there’s really no absolute truth, logic. The other side of us – the Church – claims to be godly by saying that we’re anti-intellectual, anti-reason. So both sides deny truth itself. And what happens. Both sides become irrelevant, isolating, unable to dialog. Liberal churches because they have nothing to say, conservative churches because they have no language to say it with. But both because they are not committed to truth, reason, logic, Word.

Recently I heard a worship leader, a musician, at a large Christian gathering where I was worshipping, who in the middle of the worship cried out to God in prayer, “O God, send Your fire; we want Your fire; we’ve had enough theology; we don’t want any more theology; we want fire!” And I know what he means; I can relate to that. I want the experience of You! I want Your intimate touch, like we’ve been talking about the last couple weeks; I want to hear the music; I want Your Spirit to fill my soul;” so I can relate to that. And yet I thought to myself, “Oh, how sad; he’s forgotten what theology is.” Theology comes from two Greek words, *Theos* – God and *logos* – word. It is the God-word. *In the beginning was the Word, the Logos, and the Logos was with Theos, and the Logos was Theos. And the Logos, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth. And we have beheld His glory,* for we wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger. His name is Jesus.

And Paul wrote,

*All things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. And God’s plan for the fullness of time is to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. And so God destined us in love to be His children through Jesus, to the praise of His glorious grace.*

*In Him* – I think He’s saying this, “It will be and is all symphony; the glory of God in grace. God is the author, the composer, the foundation, the truth. He is middle C and Jesus is the conductor, the Logos, the logic, uniting, harmonizing all to middle C in order that all creation would dialog and worship, joy and life to the glory of God, a symphony.

*And as the flames climbed high into the night  
to light the sacrificial rite,  
I saw Satan laughing with delight  
the day the music died.*

You see why Paul made it his practice to dialog? What was he doing? He was asking a question and the question was basically this. He was asking, "Do you like the music? I have good news; you can meet the music."

Lloyd Douglas is the author of *The Robe*. He told about when he was a college student, he lived in a flat above an old music teacher who was infirm, in a wheelchair, and every morning he would go down to take care of him and check on him. He'd open the door and he'd always say the same thing, "What's the good news?" And the old music professor would always do the same thing; he would pull out a tuning fork, slap the side of his wheelchair, hold up the tuning fork and say, "That's middle C; it was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat; the piano across the hall is out of tune, but my friend, that is middle C!"

Satan hates middle C; so Paul came to Thessalonica and established a dialog, *dialogos*, in Christ, the *Logos*. And he asked a question, "How would you like to meet middle C, harmonize with middle C?"

One thing I deeply regret in my life is that, as a child, I quit taking piano lessons. The first year was mostly learning notes and scales, the logic of the piano, and the first lesson was on middle C. And I quit, because I felt no fire. But I'm convinced now that I wouldn't have quit if I had just heard some really great piano music, like Lynryd Skynryd, for instance. My parents never listened to Lynryd Skynryd, great, great piano music. If I would have appreciated the music, I would have appreciated the logic, the scales.

Christianity is music appreciation on a universal scale. The kingdom of God is a symphony. So when Paul came to town, he explained the score as best he could, because we can't ask the entire symphony every note, every harmonic oscillation in the symphony. But Paul explained enough to establish a dialog. He explained the score but he also sang the song. For Paul loved the music, and his life was the music, *No longer I but Christ who lives within me*. And His word is *Theology*, all subjects.

True science, philosophy, theology; they have always been worship, built on a solid faith that there is a God and there is a symphony and He is glorified when we learn the score. *Love the Lord your God*, in other words, *with all your mind*. That is, take an adult class; learn stuff. There are some great ones going on; Jackie is teaching one now; Gary is teaching one; Aram will be doing one on the basics of our faith next semester, hallelujah, amen, that's right. Great adult education classes, and you can get information back there. Take an adult ed class. Read books; ask questions; study Scripture, and never, ever be afraid of *dialogos*. Why? Because the *Logos* is your friend; trust Him, have faith in Him.

I tell you this; my greatest moments of worship – and I used to not believe that this would be true – my greatest moments of worship in the last few years have come after hours of laborious study alone in my office looking at all kinds of truth revealed in authoritative

Scripture but not understanding exactly what it means. And also looking at all kinds of incredible truth revealed in creation through science, but not understanding what it all means. All this stuff in my head, sitting there asking the question, "What does it mean?" And then it's like a whisper in my soul, "Peter, look; it's all about, and it's all united in Me, your Friend, the baby in the manger." It's like, for a split second, I just catch a little glimpse of the great symphony and I'm undone, just weeping for joy, in worship! It's like fire, because I'm part of the symphony.

I'll close with this story Max ??? tells, about a hot spring night in Lawrence, KS. The historic Hawk auditorium is packed with eager music lovers waiting for Beethoven's Third Symphony. The Leipzig Gwindthaus orchestra, oldest continually playing orchestra in the world, was touring the United States and this night they were playing in Lawrence, KS, and they were tuning their instruments, simply making noise until the conductor walked up on the stage, raised his baton, commanded silence, and then brought it down in a symphony of glory, as millions and billions of harmonic oscillations and vibrations all came into a logical dialog, a harmony with middle C that was experienced by 2,000 music lovers, mathematicians of intuition, experienced as ecstasy. And the music spilled out of the auditorium, and out of the auditorium doors that were opened for the cool air to come in on that hot spring night. And the music found a dog, an ordinary brown Kansas dog, a curious brown dog who was fascinated by the sound, who liked the music.

So this dog followed his ears into the auditorium and right up on stage between the double basses, through the second violins, into the cellos, his tail wagging to the music. He stopped and watched the cellos for a long time, and he wouldn't leave. He was just lost in the splendor, because, you know, brown Kansas dogs just don't see this every day. He visited the woodwinds; he turned his heads toward the trumpets; he stopped between the flute players and finally, he sat down right by the side of the world-famous German conductor. And the symphony came undone. The musicians started to chuckle and laugh, and the audience began to smile and laugh until finally, the symphony stopped; there was no more sound; the entire symphony stopped by one brown, ordinary Kansas dog. And then the conductor turned around; and the entire auditorium full of witnesses, wondered what he'd do. And he smiled; and he bent down and petted the dog for awhile, and then he spoke to the dog in German. And the dog seemed to understand that it was a friend; the conductor took the dog off the stage and put him down on the side where he could listen to the music. Then he walked back up on the stage to the applause of thousands, lifted his baton and brought it down once again; just that much more glorious because of the dog.

Do you know who you are, Christians? You're brown, ordinary, Kansas dogs that have been found by the music, who lumber into the symphony that is the Kingdom of God. Only the maestro will not lead you off the stage; He invites you to stay forever by His side, and as your tail wags in dialog with the symphony, you become part of the symphony, the Kingdom of God. Remember the sermon title, *The Music in Hell*? You probably thought that was like AC/DC or Twisted Sister; it's a trick question. There is no music in hell, for there's no middle C and no *Logos*. "No way, dude; our album cover's totally liked to us. Hell" – *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* – and it's good theology.