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Mid-Atlantic Christadelphian Bible School - 2001

THE HOUSE OF ASAPH - FAMILY OF FAITH AND MASTERS OF MUSIC

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study #4: The zeal of the house of Asaph

Well thank you brother chairman, and my dear brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This morning, then, we come to the next story, or the next stage, of the house of Asaph as we trace them through the divine record. You'll remember that in our previous session we took the house of Asaph from the time that David had first appointed them, through to the time of their singing of praise at the consecration of the temple; and, that when the house of Asaph lead that singing of praise in the days of Solomon, that this was about 40 years from the time that David had first selected Asaph, that he might be in charge of the music of praise. So we've gone from about BC 1000 to BC 960 at the time of the dedication of the temple. Then, from the time of Solomon, we moved to the crisis of Jehoshaphat and we found that that's about another 100 years in time. We've gone from BC 960 down to BC 860, therefore, the sons of Asaph that sang that song at the front of the choir in the days of Jehoshaphat, 100 years after the time of Solomon must be about 2 or 3 generations later on in that family. They're not the same people, they're not the same singers; this would be the grandsons of those who would have sung at the time of the celebrations in the temple.

Now, after the death of Jehoshaphat, disaster struck the kingdom of Judah for almost 20 years, because in those 20 years we find from the divine record that Athaliah, who was, of course, Jezebel's daughter, was the power behind the throne, both in the reigns of her husband, who was Jehoram, and also in the reign of her son, who was Ahaziah. Finally, after the death of both her husband and her son, she took the kingdom for herself and she ruled Judah for a period of 6 years, and for one brief moment of time, b&s, the house of Jezebel was in control of both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, the house of Jezebel ruled all Israel. Her taste most certainly did not run to the songs of the house of Asaph; but, during that time, the time of Athaliah's reign, Jehoiada the priest and his faithful wife, Jehoshabeath, were planning a spiritual revival. They wanted to reinstate the Davidic line, which had all but been wiped out by Athaliah, and after 6 years of preparation, they acted. We're told of this in 2 Chronicles 23. So now we've come to BC 835; so, this is now 25 years after the crisis in the life of Jehoshaphat; we're now 25 years further on, probably another generation on, in the family of the house of Asaph.

In 2 Chronicles 23, we're told of the arrangements that Jehoiada made, that he might reinstitute the Davidic line. We're told there in the 3rd verse, it says that, 'all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And he said unto them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as Yahweh hath said of the sons of David'. I've no doubt, by the way, that as Jehoiada said those words in verse 3, 'behold, the king's son shall reign', that he brought out from behind him this little boy, the little boy Joash, and there must have been great weeping and lamentation on that day, when the nation realized that one child of the line of David had been miraculously preserved in the providence of God. They covenanted with Jehoiada on that day, that truly they would enthrone this boy, that the Davidic line might be preserved.

So, the arrangements that Jehoiada made were, verse 6, 'that none were to come into the house of Yahweh, save the priests, and they that minister'; and the Levites, verse 7, 'were to compass the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand'. We're told in the 8th verse that, 'the Levites and all Judah did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest had commanded, and took every man his men that were to come in on the Sabbath, with them that were to go out on the Sabbath; for Jehoiada the priest dismissed not the courses'. So you see, by the way, you'll see what it says there in verse 8, the courses, the courses of the priests, the 24 courses of the priests and the courses of the singers were changed over each Sabbath day. So one course finished and left and a new course arrived, and the courses crossed over on the Sabbath each week. Well, on this occasion, Jehoiada cancelled all leave! no one was allowed to leave on this occasion, including the singers.

Verse 10 says, 'He set all the people, every man having his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, along by the altar and the temple, by the king round about. Then they brought out the king's son, and put upon him the crown, and gave him the testimony (which I'm sure was a scroll of the Law) and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, God save the king. Now, when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people into the house of Yahweh, and she looked, and behold, 'the king stood at his pillar at the entering in, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king; and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of music, and such as taught to sing praise'. Now, on this occasion of the coronation of the boy king, the singers were there and also the priests, on trumpets, says the 13th verse. I think the presence of the singers here turn this matter of the royal coronation into an act of worship before Almighty God. And it wasn't just any singers, do you notice that? It wasn't just that the singers were present, because verse 13 says, that specifically those who sang on that occasion were those who were singers with instruments of music and such as taught to sing praise, or as Rotherham's translation says, 'such as lead the offering of praise'.

Now, these were the elite among the singers. If you come back to 1 Chronicles 25, I believe that this is the group that are referred to on this occasion; because, who

Jehoiada really assembled to sing on that occasion were the leaders of all the singers. In 1 Chronicles 25, we're told of these in the 7th verse; it says there, 'So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the sons of Yahweh, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight'. So these particular ones, the 288 members of 1 Chronicles 25 verse 7, they were the specially skilled singers who lead all the others. Remember how we said on an earlier occasion, there were actually 4,000 who sang in the choirs, but these 288 members of 1 Chronicles 25 verse 7, they were the instructed ones. They were the leaders of all the singers and they were broken up into courses, and we're told that the courses, from verses 8 to 31, well, there were 24 courses. The first of all those courses, says the 9th verse, 'Now the first lot came forth for Asaph to Joseph'. So the very first of all the courses of the elite singers were none other than the house of Asaph.

So, coming back to 2 Chronicles now and chapter 23 verse 13, where we're told 'that Jehoiada assembled those singers such as taught to sing praise': those he gathered together on that occasion were the leaders themselves, and amongst those we believe, was the house of Asaph. Why did Jehoiada ask for these to be present on this day? I think it's because, b&s, he saw in this event, the coronation of a man of David, to be a true milestone in the spiritual revival of the nation, and he wanted the very best. He wanted the highest standard from the beginning of this boy's reign, that it might be a benchmark for all to follow; so, he said, 'on this day, we'll get the very best of all the singers, that they might sing on the occasion of the coronation of this king, and the house of Asaph were there and they sang. We're told in the 18th verse that as a result of that, Jehoiada established that, because it says in verse 18, 'Jehoiada appointed the offices of the house of Yahweh, by the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had distributed in the house of Yahweh, to offer the burnt offerings of Yahweh, as it is written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and singing, as it was ordained by David'. So, he ordained priests to offer after the Law of Moses and he ordained singers to praise after the ordinance of David. In fact, I think there was a concern here that there be no unauthorized change from these standards that had been set on an earlier occasion by David himself. Now isn't this remarkable, b&s, that here again, at the moment of the coronation of Joash, what we really have organized by Jehoiada, is a spiritual revival in the nation. The moment there's a spiritual revival in the nation, who's there quick as a flash? but the house of Asaph. Whenever there was a moment of spiritual revival in Judah, you'll always find the house of Asaph there, ready to sing the songs of praise, and to lift the nation back to spiritual heights. Marvellous family this one!

Now, this is 25 years after the crisis of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles chapter 20. Well, the reign of the young king began well, but after Jehoiada was dead, it deteriorated; and, if you come to 2 Chronicles 24 and verses 17 to 19, we find, that in the later part of Joash's reign, that everything began to deteriorate spiritually. We're told there, 'Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. They left the house of Yahweh Elohim of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem

for this their trespass. Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto Yahweh; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear'. So the nation again deteriorated into a period of spiritual apostasy. In fact, the next king, Amaziah, come and have a look at him in 2 Chronicles 25 verse 14, just imagine what it would be like to be a member of the house of Asaph during this time.

In 2 Chronicles 25 and verse 14 it says this, 'It came to pass after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods'. Isn't it a remarkable thing how perverse the flesh is! By the way, b&s, you see, Amaziah has just successfully defeated the Edomites, so therefore, Yahweh the God of Israel is greater than the gods of Edom; but he purposely brought home the gods of Edom and set them up to be his gods and worshipped them. Isn't the flesh strange, b&s? and verse 15 says, 'That the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Amaziah, and He sent unto him a prophet, which said unto him, Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thine hand? And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten?' You know, in the AV the 16th verse is probably a little lacking in punch, because this is what Amaziah really said, and I'm reading from the RSV, 'It came to pass as he talked to him that the king said unto him, have we made you a royal counsellor; stop! why should you be put to death?' So that a man who stood up to proclaim the truth of God was threatened with immediate death by this particular king. How would you like to be one of the singers trying to sing the songs of praise in the days of this man who worshipped the gods of Edom?

If you come to the time of Ahaz, just a short while later, in 2 Chronicles 28, we're told this in the 22nd verse,(these were not good times in the history of Judah) and we're told in verse 22, 'In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against Yahweh: this is that king Ahaz. FOR, he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of Yahweh, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger Yahweh Elohim of his fathers'.

Do you know, b&s, that between the time of Joash and Hezekiah, who will now come upon the throne after the death of Ahaz, his father, between Joash and Hezekiah, the words sing, singers and singing are never once found. It's as if the whole story of songs of praise disappear out of the record, and so what did the house of Asaph do in this era of spiritual darkness? Well, I know what they did, b&s, they preserved their faith and they went underground. You see, there would be no daily choir practices with the doors of the temple nailed up, would there? You couldn't get into the temple in the days of Ahaz, he'd locked them out! but in their private homes, the house of Asaph upheld their

family standards, and in their private homes, they continued to ascend into the divine presence.

Remarkable story, this particular family! So much so that when Hezekiah comes to the throne in 2 Chronicles 29, we read these words in the 3rd verse; it says of him, 'He, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of Yahweh and repaired them. And he brought in the priests and Levites, and gathered them together into the east street, And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of Yahweh Elohim of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of this place.' Verse 11, 'My sons, be not now negligent: for Yahweh hath chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that ye should minister unto Him, and burn incense'. So, the appeal that Hezekiah makes at the time of the beginning of his reign, this period of spiritual revival (it's not to the priests, you notice, but to the Levites) and he asks the Levites to help him that they might revive the nation again.

Now, look what verse 12 says, who responded? 'Then the Levites arose, Mahath the son of Amasai, and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites: and of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi, and Azariah the son of Jehalelel: and of the Gershonites; Joah the son of Zimmah, and Eden the son of Joah: And of the sons of Elizaphan; Shimri, and Jeiel: and of the sons of Asaph, verse 13, Zechariah and Mattaniah'. So here now, as the Levites responded to the call of Hezekiah that they might renew the nation, why the sons of Asaph are there, and they're amongst the Levites who respond at the time that Hezekiah asks them to respond. Of course, you know what they did because verse 16 says, 'the priests went into the inner part of the house of Yahweh to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of Yahweh into the court of the house of Yahweh, and the Levites took it, to carry it out abroad into the brook Kidron'. Now you realize what we're being told in the 16th verse, b&s? you see, this is the house of Asaph, these are the singers, they've got the delicate fingers of musicians, these are they who pluck the psaltery, and yet here they are with cuts and scratches, broken nails and bruised thumbs lugging the rubble of apostasy out of the temple. Do you think that would stop the house of Asaph? COUNT US IN, they say to Hezekiah! Oh no! there was no hesitation, was there, as far as this family was concerned, to be involved in this matter of spiritual revival? They were there in the thick of it! It only took 16 days, because the 17th verse says, 'that they began on the first day of the month' and at the end of the verse it says, 'in the 16th day of the first month they made an end'.

And it was, says verse 20, on the very next morning, that Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of Yahweh and they brought offerings' that they might make a sacrifice of atonement for the nation, and not for Judah only, because verse 24 tells us, 'That the priests killed them and they made reconciliation with their blood upon the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel, for the king commanded that the sin offering should be made for ALL Israel'. You see,

Hezekiah intended not to just revive Judah, b&s, he wanted to bring the whole nation back to the things of the worship of the Father. He had great ambitions did this king for the greatest good of the nation, so now there is this sacrifice of atonement made. Having made atonement, we're now told of the celebrations that were set forth in the house of God, and verse 25 to verse 29 tells us what happened.

'He set the Levites in the house of Yahweh with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of Yahweh by his prophets. And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of Yahweh began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped'. Now notice the order, b&s, notice the tremendous spirit of this order, for what we're told here, first, there is the offering of atonement, verses 21 to 24; and THEN the song of Yahweh, verses 25 to 28. Isn't there a marvellous lesson in that order of events that took place on this day? because only a person who knows the blessing of forgiveness, can truly sing from the heart, God's praise in fullness. So forgiveness first and then the song of praise that came from grateful hearts subsequently.

You know, I think there are two big questions about the songs that were sung this day by the house of Asaph. Two obvious questions, I think, emerge from this record. Now, the first question is: how long did they sing for? Well, it seems, says verse 27, that the singers began when the burnt offering began to be offered, and verse 28 says that they continued until the burnt offering was consumed. Now normally, at the very least, in such a burnt offering as would represent the nation, there would be as a minimum, the offering of a bullock (according to Leviticus 1). How long does it take to burn a bullock to ashes? Any idea? 30 minutes, an hour, several hours, to reduce the whole animal to ashes? so the smoke of dedication might ascend to the Father? Well, during that time, says 2 Chronicles 29, 'these singers sang their song with all their words from memory'. How did they do that? and as the burnt offering was offered, this family sang their song because that was their burnt offering to the Father!

Here's the second question. Now you see, what we're told, verse 17, it only took 16 days to cleanse the temple, the very next day, Hezekiah had these offerings organized and had these singers ready in the temple of God to sing; in fact, if you come to the very last verse of the chapter, we're told in verse 36 of 2 Chronicles 29, 'And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly'. Now just stop and think about this. In one single fortnight, b&s, these singers were asked to sing by Hezekiah and to be there on that day, when the temple was cleansed, and they stood up and they sang and they played their instruments perfectly,

the moment Hezekiah asked them. How did they do that? After 2 weeks? given that there had been absolute apostasy prior to this in the days of Ahaz and earlier? Yet when Hezekiah said I want you there to sing on that day, they were there! just like that! So how did they do it? The answer can only be, b&s, that even in those times of apostasy, this family had practiced their songs, and practiced their instruments. They were barred from the temple, but they trained in secret. They were determined never to lose their faith or to forfeit their responsibilities to the nation. So that, whenever they were needed, they were immediately ready: ready to sing without flaw, ready to sing without mistake, ready to sing without hesitation. Do you know what's unutterably said about this story, b&s? is that some of this family of the house of Asaph, may have practiced all their life, and never once had the chance to sing before the ark of God. Never once! but they practiced, father to son, son to grandson, so that when the day might come that a good king might arise, this family would always be there ready to sing their songs. What this family believed was that even their daily practice, was in itself, an offering of praise to the Father. Oh that we might learn the spirit, b&s, of this particular family!

Now this particular episode in 2 Chronicles 29 is BC 715, so that's a 120 years after the coronation of Joash in 2 Chronicles 23. This is 120 years after the coronation of Joash in 2 Chronicles 23, so that those who are singing of the house of Asaph on the occasion of this celebration of Hezekiah, would be the great grandsons of those who stood up when Jehoiada asked them; a wonderful family! this is 4 generations later in the same family. Have they lost any of their spirit? NO, I think not! you see, the great lesson that we're going to look at today, b&s, in terms of the benchmark standard of this house is this, remember that we've already looked at several of these, as we've come down through the list: we've looked at the matter of the supremacy of God; their solemnity of worship; their preeminence of principle. Well, this morning we want to dwell, for a few moments, on the principle of the excellence of endeavour: that this family stood for the principle of the excellence of endeavour in all that they did, and in all their singing.

Now, I'd like you to come back to 1 Chronicles 25, because the benchmark of how this family practiced, was really set at the time of their appointment. This is what we're told! here's the story now in a little more detail of exactly what did happen concerning the practicing of this family. It says in verse 1, 'David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals: and the number of the workmen according to their service was': (and now it's going to outline for us the details of the 24 courses), and we're told in verse 2, that there were 4 courses for the house of Asaph. We're told in verse 3, that there were 6 courses of the house of Jeduthun, and we're told in verses 4 and 5, that there were 14 courses of the house of Heman. So here's the makeup then, of the 24 courses as they're drawn from these different families: 4 from Asaph, verse 2; 6 from Jeduthun verse 3; and 14 from Heman in verses 4 and 5; and, I believe, what happened you see, each family practiced together firstly in their family

groups. So, those of Asaph would practice together under the tutelage and under the control of their father; and those of Jeduthun would come together under the hands of Jeduthun their father; and those of the house of Heman would practice together in the first instance within the house of Heman.

Now you know, b&s, if you came to the house of Lewis, and you walked into my house, you would probably hear the following on most days of the week: in one room you'd probably hear Rachmaninov's second piano concerto being played by CD, preferably by Evgeny Kissin, or some other such notable, that's probably my study, because generally when I'm at the height of writing something down and I think I've got it right, I generally would play Rachmaninov at that crucial moment; sometimes Brahms, sometimes Schubert, but definitely Rachmaninov at the height of getting it all down. So that would be my study. In another room you'll hear the cello playing, probably something by Elgar, that would be my daughter practicing for her next examination. In another room you'd probably hear the trumpet concerto by Haubold, that's my 14 year old son, who's struggling at the moment because he has braces on his teeth, but he's determined to learn that trumpet nevertheless, if he possibly can. In another room, you'll hear the piano being played for another examination, and that's my 11 year old son. In another room you'll hear something being played probably by my wife in the kitchen, and you'll hear this glorious admixture of sound, right through the house of Lewis. Now if you think that that's bad, b&s, can you imagine verses 4 and 5, what it must have been like in the house of Heman, when 14 sons all got together with their musical instruments that they might do their practice everyday? And having got all the families together, I think what then happened is this: we're told in verse 6, 'All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of Yahweh'. On the occasion of verse 6, I believe that the 'father' referred to is Asaph himself, as the chief musician of the whole lot. So, now having practiced in their family groups, they were brought together under the watchful eye of father Asaph. All the family practices now finished, now they're brought into the temple compound, that they might practice under the chief conductor; and woe betide the boy who plucked a wrong note on their psaltery or who lost their words in a psalm! because Asaph wanted it to be just perfect, because this was the song of the LORD.

They learned four things, these boys! They learned firstly, how to play their instrument; they learned secondly, how to sing the song; they learned thirdly, how to memorize the words; and, they learned fourthly, how to understand the principles behind the words. Only when they had those four things perfect, did father Asaph consider that they might be ready for the songs of worship in the temple of God, because this man demanded the excellence of endeavour in all that he organized as far as this family was concerned. So, when it says in verse 7, 'that they were instructed in the songs, and that they were cunning'. In fact, one of those words, I think it's the word 'instructed', is actually the Hebrew word for 'goad' (3925). Guess who held the goad? You know what a 'goad' is, it's what we'd call an 'ox prod', and it was used to 'encourage' in the right direction, and father Asaph no doubt, held that! in order that he might give the odd

piece of encouragement wherever necessary. So, they weren't instructed in cunning by accident, b&s; they were instructed and cunning because of the spirit of endeavour — that whatever they would do, they would do their very best for the sake of the truth, in being ready to sing these songs.

By the way, 288 members, verse 7, split into 24 courses tells us that there were 12 members in each of these 24 courses, so each course was lead by one of these sons, but there were 12 members in each course which made up the total of 288 mentioned in the 7th verse. The excellence of endeavour, b&s, this family stood for that principle. Come and have a look at 1 Chronicles chapter 9, and there we're told this in verse 33, 'And these are the singers, chief of the fathers of the Levites, who remaining in the chambers were free: for they were employed in that work day and night'. You know, Gesenius translates the word 'free' there and says it means, 'that they were exempt from duty', and obviously what it's telling us is that these who were the singers, were relieved of any other duties in the temple; but whilst they were on temple service they had responsibility as the verse says, to sing every day and every night. But you wouldn't want to think for a moment, b&s, that when the verse says they were free (6362), that it meant they were really free, because as far as Asaph was concerned that meant that when they weren't singing in the temple, they were 'free' to do some more practice! because that was the spirit of this family. They never ever gave up as far as that diligence of preparation was concerned.

In 2 Chronicles 34 in the days of Josiah, we're told this at the time they went about the repairing of the temple; reading verse 12, 'The men did the work faithfully: and the overseers of them were Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites, of the sons of Merari; and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to set it forward; AND other of the Levites that could skill of instruments of music. They also were over the bearers of burdens'. Now who were these other Levites at the end of verse 12? and I think the answer is, that since those of Merari and Kohath have already been mentioned, and yet they are singers with instruments, that they can be none other than the house of Asaph, which is the only other division of the singers not yet mentioned in this particular text. So, what we're being told here is that the singers were put in charge of the re-construction of the temple. Now what do they know about building? Well, they probably didn't know all that much, so why did Josiah put the sons of Asaph in charge of the building of the temple amongst the Levites that could skill with instruments of music? and the answer is, b&s, that their spirit of excellence in music qualified them for other spiritual responsibilities, where likewise the excellence of endeavour was needed. This family would leave nothing to chance, even in the building of the temple, everything would be done, just so! Josiah says, 'I'll put the singers in charge because I know their standard of excellence; everything will be done as it should be done!' The excellence of endeavour!

You know, b&s, I believe, as a general principle, as a general trend, there has been a movement away from 'striving for excellence' in many fields of endeavour in life.

Amongst those is the matter of music. Now, I don't know what it's like in this part of the world, so I can freely speak in the knowledge that truly I'm ignorant of what goes on in America and Canada; but, what I can tell you is that in our part of the world, there's been a trend in recent times, even in the brotherhood towards what you might call 'easy listening', 'easy playing', 'easy learning'; simple chords, simple melodies, simple words. You don't want to go in for anything that might involve effort, well, because that would be hard! Easy is much better, something that at least makes us feel that we can play an instrument, but without any particular degree of application. Well, that's a good thing, is it not? Now you see, I think that even learning musical instruments which, by the way, I think is a wonderful thing for Christadelphian children to learn, but I think the principle of examinations, is how they learn the discipline of striving for excellence and of mastering the skills that they will really need if they're going to play good music. I don't know if you have examinations here, but in New Zealand we still have the good old royal schools of London (we're really very patriotic to the English in New Zealand still) and so we have the royal college examiners who still come out on an annual basis to examine children. But you see, it's the way you get to know how to play things, and you learn your scales and arpeggios, not for the sake of learning scales and arpeggios, but so you can play wonderful music, because without those you never shall! and I think it would be good if we provided opportunities in ecclesial life for those children that learn musical instruments, to have the ability to play in ecclesial life at various occasions. There's no substitute for excellence, b&s, when it comes to harmony! good harmony, well, it's just good, you can tell it! it's a wonderful thing, you feel the excellence of that harmonic structure. When harmony is not good, and it goes back to being very simple, what do you do to make the music more interesting? well, you increase the rhythm and you accentuate the beat, it's what you do when the harmony itself is somehow lacking!

You know, the focus of a symphony orchestra is on the conductor. As one conductor once said, a very famous conductor, he said, 'an orchestra is simply a collection of people who are blowing, scraping or banging things'. But it's when the conductor stands up that it all finally comes together, and when it does, what appeared to be a cacophony of noise, suddenly turns out to be a glorious harmony of sound, under the hands of the man who stands at the front as the conductor or the chief musician. You know, if you never knew anything about art and someone showed you a 'stick figure man' you would probably think that's quite good; but once you've seen a Rembrandt, you don't think 'stick figures' are quite so good after all! Well, I think music's like that too! I think there's a standard of excellence in music that once you've discovered it, and once you've found it, and once you've understood it, you'll appreciate that there's something worth striving for. You know, the very best song and praise evenings, as our sister Julie will tell you, they come after a great deal of effort. When there's been practice, when there's been earnest endeavour to master the parts, to strive for excellence, to offer the sacrifice of praise. Yet the funny thing is, that the more the choir tries, and the more effort they put in, probably the higher they will rise on the evening, because somehow that chemistry of effort, linked to the final offering of praise, lifts us to a higher standard, because of the excellence of endeavour that went in behind it.

Don't ever let's take second best, b&s, in our songs and in our music, and just as with a 'song and praise', so with our hymns. I think that our hymns, we ought to have far greater focus on the words, on the meaning of the words, on the scriptural background of the words, on the variance of tempo, on the change of volume, that tells everyone that we really believe, and that we really understand what we're singing, and that the hymns have become a powerful adjunct to our worship and our faith before Almighty God. The excellence of endeavour, this is what this particular family stood for.

David's own standard of musicianship was one of excellence. 'A man that can play well' and 'a cunning player on a harp' are epithets applied to the king. His personal skill was such on his chosen instrument, and given that that was the case, he would certainly expect no less from those chosen to lead the songs of Yahweh on behalf of all Israel. The instruments were intended to help lift up the voice in praise. and to do this they needed to be played with passion and skill. There was no casual spirit in the house of Asaph. To offer thanks and praise in the presence of God demanded their supreme effort in reaching the highest standard of excellence. Their skill came only through patient and incessant practice, and sprang from a mutual spirit of striving to give of their very best in praise; that they were finally both instructed and cunning is the divine testimony concerning their efforts. How glorious it would be, b&s, if in all our songs of worship to the Father, we captured the spirit of this family, ever ready to sing, ever ready to play, without mistake, without flaw, without hesitation, as best as we could in this present mortal life — let us take up the spirit of the excellence of endeavour!