

## LET US DRAW NEAR - Biblical Worship and the Warming of the Soul – Part four

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### WORSHIP - ESTABLISHING THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

**2 Samuel 6:11-15** - "And the ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household. [12] And it was told King David, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. [13] And when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. [14] And David danced before the Lord with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod. [15] So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn."

The title of this message certainly fits with the desire of David's heart at this point of time in his reign. David is the new king over Judah. He was crowned king in **2 Samuel chapter 2**, right after the death of Saul. Naturally, David wanted to do a good job. More than that, because he had a heart for God. David wanted to be a **godly** king. More than anything else, David wanted to **establish the presence of the Lord** for his term as king. He had seen the errors of pride and ambition in Saul. David wanted to be a king after God's own heart.

David was wise enough to know that at that time the central visible representation of the presence of God was the **ark of the covenant**. The ark was a physical symbol of God's abiding with them. The commandments of God were in that ark. The mercy seat was on top of that ark. The tokens of God's special presence as He delivered millions of Jews from Egypt and the hand of Pharaoh were in that ark. **And David knew he still had lots of enemies to be delivered from.**

To his credit David related that ongoing deliverance to God's presence among them. And God's **presence** - at least His **manifest, delivering presence** - was related to Israel's **worship**. That's an important insight. David wasn't some charismatic fanatic. He just wanted to defeat his enemies. That's the whole reason David wanted that ark back in its rightful place in Judah. David didn't tie worship to some emotional stirring. He tied it to Judah's survival.

Saul really hadn't cared that much about the ark. He actually left the ark, totally unattended, ignored at the **house of Abinadab**, for twenty years. He never even bothered to send some delegation of troops to bring it back home. Saul is forever a picture of a man who got so involved in pursuing his own ambitions as leader that the central place of the worship and presence of the Lord was marginalized in the lives of the people. I tried to make a note of that in my study of this text.

We won't actually get into this sixth chapter of Second Samuel very much until two Sundays from now. I took the time to read it to set the stage for what **led** up to David's celebration of the ark. To make more sense of today's text, let me quickly go over the **background** that led up to the events as we read them. We need to go back in time to the final years of the reign of Saul, the capture of the ark of the Lord by the Philistines, and the collapse of the priesthood of Eli. These events are all recorded in **1 Samuel chapters 4 through 7.**

We will study these background chapters today. We're going to read more Scripture together than usual. Next week we'll get right into 2 Samuel chapter 6 in detail.

- 1) **JUDAH WAS DEFEATED BADLY BY THE PHILISTINES AND FAILED TO TAKE THE TIME TO DISCERN THE REASON FOR HER WEAKNESS**

**1 Samuel 4:1-2** - "And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. [2] The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, **Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle.**"

Now, those two verses give the bare-boned explanation of ***what happened***. Judah took a whipping from the Philistines. You can tell from the very next verse the people were perplexed as to ***why*** the Lord had allowed them to be so badly beaten. You can also see how blind they all were as to the ***true cause*** of their misery:

**1 Samuel 4:3** - "And when the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, **"Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies."**

At least they recognized that their defeat wasn't due merely to the army of the Philistines. No enemy was a match for the God of Israel. So far, so good. Then, right in the middle of the third verse it seems as though a light goes on - "**Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh!**" Of course! That was the problem. They lost the battle because they didn't have the ark with them. So they'll go down to Shiloh, get the ark, and surely God will trample the Philistines under their anointed feet!

But that wasn't the problem at all. They didn't lose the battle with the Philistines because they didn't take the ***ark*** with them. There was a different reason entirely for their weakness. The text actually describes it for us in detail:

**1 Samuel 2:12-17** - "Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the Lord. [13] The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, [14] and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. [15] Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw." [16] And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force." [17] **Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord, for the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt.**"

Eli was the priest. His sons ministered with him. In other words, these men were in charge of the ***worship*** of the people. But the worship of the priesthood, and consequently, of the people, was corrupt. It wasn't done ***the way God said it was to be done***. Make a mental note of those words for now. Remember them. They were still ***worshipping***. But they weren't worshipping ***according to instruction***.

That's a very important point. Most North American Christians, as a result of growing up in ***democracies***, have a deeply imbedded sense that ***how*** we worship - as long as we ***do*** worship - is entirely up to us. That just seems so naturally right to us. But there's a problem with it. You won't find that idea anywhere in the Scriptures - Old Testament or New.

Now look at God's response to this corruption of worship:

**1 Samuel 2:27-33** - "And there came a man of God to Eli and said to him, "Thus the Lord has said, 'Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh? [28] Did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire

from the people of Israel. [29] Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?' [30] Therefore the Lord the God of Israel declares: 'I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever,' but now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. [31] Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. [32] Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. [33] The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to grieve his heart, and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men.'

Behold the issue of worship. Because the people were corrupt in the **way** they worshiped the Lord, they **became powerless in all other areas of life**. Like most of us, they weren't quick to put these two things together. What does a piece of boiled meat in a pot have to do with defeating the Philistines?

You can rephrase that **worship question** in a thousand different ways. **What does going to God's House regularly have to do with a strong marriage? What does Bible study have to do with victory in the battle with temptation? What does bringing my offering before the Lord have to do with my addiction to pornography?**

The Lord answers those questions very specifically in one of the great **life verses** found in this passage - **1 Samuel 2:30b** - **"....the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.'"**

I wonder how many people will gather in churches across our country today, and will call out to the Lord with their need, only to be **lightly esteemed** by God. Can there be **anything** worse than that?

I wonder how many people will cry out to God about their wayward teenager, never remembering the hapless, loose habits of worship they established in their home years ago. I wonder how many people will cry out for deliverance from temptation and binding habit, never thinking about the fact that they scatter off to one church after another, or never read their Bible at home, or don't even consider the fact that they rob God with their own investing of His tithes and offerings.

People never link those battles - the **winning** of those battles - with purity and faithfulness and obedience in worship. Remember that lesson all your life. **Nothing determines the direction and success of your life like honoring the Lord with a sincere, obedient heart of worship.**

All of this relates to the second point:

## 2) **JUDAH BELIEVED THAT TAKING THE ARK INTO BATTLE WITH THEM WOULD GUARANTEE VICTORY OVER THEIR ENEMIES**

**1 Samuel 4:3-10** - **"And when the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies."**

[4] "So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. [5] As soon as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the

camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. [6] And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of the Lord had come to the camp, [7] the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. [8] Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. [9] Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight." [10] So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers."

All of this is very instructive. Remember the *real cause* of Judah's defeat from the previous point. She was *disobedient to the call to honor the Lord in her worship*. The solution wasn't *taking the ark into battle*. The solution was to *forsake disobedience* and to *commence honoring the Lord*.

This lesson is timeless. *I can never use the past history of a walk with God to compensate for a present neglect in honoring the Lord according to His terms in worship*. The ark of the Lord couldn't be used as a *lucky rabbit's foot* to ward off evil and bring God's blessing. God doesn't deal in *superstition*. He deals in *obedience and worship from pure, God-honoring hearts*.

Read the rest of 1 Samuel chapter four. As a result of their spiritual failure, the ark of the Lord was taken into captivity by the Philistines. What a graphic lesson! Nothing else in our walk with the Lord will sustain its power, life, and fruitfulness without integrity of heart and purity of worship. David had a big army. There was no *external* reason to lose these battles. Military strategists couldn't solve the problem. All of the outward disintegration was the result of a *worship* failure.

### 3) THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS A CONSTANT SOURCE OF IRRITATION TO THOSE WHO DON'T HONOR HIM

The ark of the Lord was nothing but a *pain producer* for the Philistines:

1 Samuel 5:1-12 - "When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. [2] Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. [3] And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. [4] But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. [5] This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. [6] The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. [7] And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god. [8] So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" They answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath." So they brought the ark of the God of Israel there. [9] But after they had brought it around, the hand of the Lord was against the city, causing a very great panic, and he afflicted the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them. [10] So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. But as soon as the ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought around to us the ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people." [11] They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and

our people." For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there. [12] The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven."

First at Ashdod and then at Gath the ark caused nothing but pain and misery in the Philistine camp. The presence of God had actually become a **curse** instead of a **blessing**. Listen, opposing God's will doesn't somehow **chase His presence out of this world**. It's **His** world. **He** made it. And **He** rules it. Opposing His known will, in any area of life, doesn't push Him out of the universe. It simply **sets everything about your life against the grain of His world**. And you're the one who will end up getting the splinters.

And nothing in the world can fix that arrangement except **humility, confession** and **repentance**. Until that point of wisdom comes, however much diversion and distraction your own pursuits may bring, you will remain empty and at odds with everyone and everything God brings your way. **His presence simply irritates the existing structures of your life**.

It's at this point the Philistines **get rid of the ark of the Lord**. In **1 Samuel chapter 6** they put it on a cart pulled by two cows (remember that detail for next week's teaching). Without any help or prompting, the cows immediately head for the border of Judah.

Because of Saul's insensitivity to the Presence of the Lord, the ark landed at the **house of Abinadab** on the way home and remained there for **twenty years (1 Samuel 7:1-2)**. Saul doesn't even miss it. The people had ignored God's pattern for worship for so long they didn't even notice that the very symbolic **hub** of God's presence was nowhere to be found. **You can get used to doing religious things without God**. I need to remind myself of that truth.

I need to remind myself of that truth over and over. That fact should frighten us. **Anyone can get used to living without the presence of the Lord**. It can start to feel **normal**. You simply become consumed by other things. People who **crave** His presence start to look fanatical and ridiculous. You begin to drift from **orienting your life after God**.

As this background study closes, so does Saul's reign. What started out so well, ends so badly. Just as the ark wasn't deemed important enough to bring back to Shiloh, Saul couldn't maintain the glory of God in his own heart and reign.

Here's the take-home life lesson from this teaching. Here is what worship has to do with life. That's why it is of crucial importance that His **throne** (remember Isaiah 6?) is honored and remembered. That's why there is no **sacrifice** (remember Mary and her precious ointment?) is too great to be gladly offered. Only His rule preserves your life. And only worship - **understood and practiced on His terms** - establishes His presence.