

WHY WHOLE-HEARTEDNESS IN WORSHIP ISN'T ENOUGH

2 Samuel 6:1-23 - "David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. [2] And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim. [3] And they carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, [4] with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark. [5] And David and all the house of Israel were making merry before the Lord, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. [6] And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. [7] And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God. [8] And David was angry because the Lord had burst forth against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah, to this day. [9] And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" [10] So David was not willing to take the ark of the Lord into the city of David. But David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. [11] 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. [16] As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart. [17] And they brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. [18] And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts [19] and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed, each to his house. [20] And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" [21] And David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord—and I will make merry before the Lord. [22] I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." [23] And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death."

A strange passage, this. It's like one of those funny mirrors at the circus. Nothing looks the way we expect it to look. The lessons seem all backward to our expectations. If there was ever a time when the Word of God feels like a **sword**, this is one of them. It stabs our attention and cuts away our cherished assumptions and misconceptions. No one gets the reaction we expect from God. **David** dancing in worship doesn't look very king-like.

There's an **impropriety** to his actions. Worship must be **dignified**. This doesn't look **reverent** to many of us. Yet God seems totally pleased with it. **Michal** instantly rushes in to protect the **reverence** of worship. She doesn't hate **God**. She loves God. In fact, she feels David's emotionalism is **unworthy** of God. That God is displeased with emotional worship is a very common assumption. So good for Michal. We need people to keep worship anchored in soundness and dignity.

But then God **judges** her for the wicked words that come out of her mouth. In judgment that is probably meant to picture more than just a lack of children, her critical attitude leads to her perpetual **barrenness** before the Lord (23).

Then there is something else that bothers us - perhaps most of all - in this story. God seems **unfair** to Uzzah. We all know that the main cause of offending God is the exercise of our wicked wills in opposition to His. **Rebellion** is the root of all wickedness. And God's wrath, as Paul says, is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness. So far, so good.

But our text seems to record a different situation altogether. Uzzah isn't **rebellious** against God. He is trying to **protect** the ark

of the Lord. He isn't trying to **dishonor** God. He's concerned about God's **glory**. And yet God strikes him dead. It just doesn't seem fair.

But maybe we've gone too quickly. Perhaps there are more details than we see at first glance. Think back to our teaching two Sundays ago. Consider how Judah lost an enormous battle with the Philistines. Then remember how Judah mistakenly assumed the reason for her defeat was forgetting to take the ark of the Lord along into battle.

Of course, that wasn't the reason for the defeat at all. The real problem was their **carelessness with regard to their worship**. Under Eli and his sons the worship had become corrupt. The people came before the Lord any old way they chose. They were selfish. They were disobedient. They didn't regard God's laws. And God punished them for it.

Then Judah took the ark along into battle, thinking that would bring victory. The ark was captured by the Philistines. Judah was again miserably defeated. The glory of the Lord departed from Judah. What's more, the ark was a constant source of irritation for the Philistines who captured it. It brought nothing but pain and suffering. Finally, the Philistines put the ark on a cart and sent it home. The ark came to rest at the **House of Abinadab**. For twenty years nobody in Judah even cared enough about the ark to go and bring it home - until king David came on the scene.

All of those details are recorded in **1 Samuel, chapters 2 through 7**. We studied them. That's the point at which today's text picks up the story. It is while the ark is being brought back by David that this whole incident with Uzzah takes place.

There are some neglected lessons about worship here that we must never allow to fade from our mental hard drives. We'll look at one this week and two next Sunday.

1) **A PASSION FOR WORSHIP WITHOUT AN ACCOMPANYING PASSION FOR KNOWLEDGE IS A DANGEROUS THING**

Think carefully about this. Why does Uzzah reach out to steady the ark?

"Well, that's pretty obvious, pastor Don. The text tells us he was simply trying to keep it from falling off the cart."

2 Samuel 6:6-7 - "And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah **put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled.** [7] **And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God."**

It seems simple enough at first glance. The "**oxen stumbled**"(6). The cart probably hit a stone or a rut. Uzzah couldn't bear to see the ark of the Lord topple over into the mud. But **why was the ark on a cart?** God had given very specific instructions as to how the ark was to be moved from place to place:

Numbers 4:15-20 - "And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, as the camp sets out, after that the sons of Kohath **shall come to carry these, but they must not touch the holy things, lest they die.** These are the things of the tent of meeting that the sons of Kohath **are to carry.** [16] "And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall have charge of the oil for the light, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering, and the anointing oil, with the oversight of the whole tabernacle and all that is in it, of the sanctuary and its vessels." [17] The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, [18] "Let not the tribe of the clans of the Kohathites be destroyed from among the Levites, [19] but deal thus with them, that they may live and not die when they come near to the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint them each to his task and to his burden, [20] but they shall not go in to look on the holy things even for a moment, lest they die."

The ark was to be **carried**. It was never, ever to be placed on a **cart** pulled by **livestock**. Well, does this really matter? How important can it be to carry the ark one way rather than another. As long as it gets from point A to point B, what difference can the transport make? **Four times** God warns if the ark was touched by human hands it would bring **immediate death**.

Now, think back to what we studied last week. Why would David put the ark of the Lord on a cart? What would have generated that idea in his mind? I think there is only one answer to that question. **Abinadab** probably told David and his men **how the ark of the Lord had come to his house. That's how the Philistines had sent the ark to the border of Judah.**

It seemed to work fine. So that's what David did. Listen - ***he followed the pattern passed on to him instead of the instruction laid down in God's Word.***

Please don't make the mistake of thinking we're just studying ancient history in this text. Here's the issue: Is ***sincerity*** enough in worship? Is all well just because we approach God with ***loving hearts?*** For that matter, is worship just a ***heart*** issue, as many people think in today's church? How important is ***knowledge*** when we approach God? How important is ***understanding?***

This is the issue. How much does it matter that we take the time to ***learn God's ways*** in worship? Or, to put the question in a slightly different way, ***how destructive is ignorance when we approach God, even if our hearts mean well?*** This is a ***key*** issue in worship. How important is it that we approach God in ***His*** way rather than ***ours***.

It's too bad nobody has the chance to ask Uzzah that question today. Nobody was doing anything that looked ***bad*** as they danced and sang and praised their way in joyous celebration in front of the ark. Nobody was thinking any bad thoughts about God. Everybody ***loved*** God. Everybody was ***celebrating God's greatness and glory***. Except for Michal, no one had any ill intent whatsoever in his heart.

But Uzzah ends up dead - ***dead at the hand of God***. Now, let me ask the question again. When we're considering worship and our corporate approach to God ***how important is knowledge?*** How important are God's ***instructions?*** How important is ***doctrine?*** How important are the ***instructions*** in the ***Bible*** when we gather together to worship the Lord?

We're going to be studying what the ***Bible*** says about our worship for the next dozen weeks, or so. Why bother? Why don't we just ***worship?*** Who needs all this study? Worship is just about the ***heart***. Or is it? I believe this story about Uzzah is the Holy Spirit's way of putting two truths into our minds:

- a) ***Enthusiasm, by itself, won't make God happy with our worship.*** Enthusiasm in worship is right and appropriate and desirable. God takes no delight in dead worship. And these people ***were*** enthusiastic. They ***were*** passionate. They were ***full of joy***.

And that ***wasn't*** their problem. God is never against ***passion*** in worship. I believe He ***requires*** it. But these people were ***careless*** about their worship. And that ***was*** their problem. And Uzzah teaches us that ***without due regard for instruction, enthusiasm self-destructs***. To ***obey*** is still ***better*** than sacrifice. And those famous words were spoken regarding the practice of ***worship*** before the Lord.

Here's the second lesson Uzzah's account teaches:

- b) ***I don't have to intend anything evil to dishonor the Lord and invite His displeasure.*** Judah was guilty for what she was doing, even though she was probably ***unaware*** of her guilt. David and the people of Judah either ***forgot*** about the instructions regarding the ark, or they ***never took the time to learn them in the first place***. Those seem to be the only two options, because we know God ***did*** give clear instructions on these matters.

The fact that David ***resented*** God's wrath is clear from the text: ***2 Samuel 6:8 - "And David was angry because the Lord had burst forth against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah, to this day."***

"Perez-uzzah" means ***"the break of Uzzah"***. I hope you can see God's design in that telling term. There is great peril in marginalizing the importance of obedient worship. This text tells me it has to do with the ***making*** or ***breaking*** of lives. This is what did Uzzah in. This is what finished him off. It means this was dreadfully ***serious*** for Uzzah. No one on the scene seemed to understand ***why*** God acted the way He acted.

Even David, the king after God's own heart, can't get his head around this difficult event. But the problem isn't with ***God***. The problem lay elsewhere, and it's highly relevant to the careless attitudes people can form to the learning of worship in the church today.

Consider this question: What was happening in the minds of the people during those twenty or more years the ark was left deserted at the house of Abinadab? God didn't ***make*** the people go and bring it back to its proper place. He didn't seem to ***punish*** the people for not showing His Presence due regard. He didn't ***make*** the

people give Him any particular attention at all.

But, while the people were free to **ignore** the old covenant ark of the Lord, there was something else happening that was **beyond their control**. **God's instructions were slipping from their awareness**. The **parents**, and then the parents' **children**, were gradually **training themselves to think about life without reference to God's commands**. They weren't **learning** about God. It takes no effort at all to **unlearn** the instructions of the Lord. Think about that as you tally up your faithfulness in coming to God's house or plotting the future pattern of your children's worship patterns.

Yes, they were **free** to ignore God's instructions. They were free to worship according to their own whims, schedules, and inclinations. God didn't **check their homework** to see if they were inclining their minds to His Word.

But there are **consequences** to ignoring God's instructions. There are **always** consequences to not learning His will and way. **Dancing and singing before the ark won't help if I don't know the instructions about the ark**. And it takes **time** to learn the instructions. And it takes **effort**.

There are thousands of Christians who forget this. If I don't take the time to **learn God's ways**, I will fail the Lord without **knowing** I am failing the Lord. But I will still be **accountable** for my failure. I just won't know **why** my spiritual life is unraveling at the seams.

That's why it is with the deepest sense of meaning Jesus said it would be **the truth that would set us free**. Not our **emotions**. Not our **sincerity**. The **truth**. The greatest freedom is the freedom from **blunder**. Freedom from **blunder** turns into freedom from **judgement**. Only the possession of truth can prevent that, even in our pursuit of God.

Do be passionate about your worship of God. But let that passion arise from the cradle of **truth** known in the depths of your heart. Let your **mind** warm your **heart**, and your **heart** fire your **worship**.