

## **Introduction**

I want to start out this morning with a little guessing game. I have a list of items which in my mind have a common characteristic. You see if you can figure out what that characteristic is. Here is the list: flowers, intelligence, flavorings, grass, fur, leather, and sugar. The list again is: flowers, intelligence, grass, fur, leather, and sugar. What do these items have in common? In my mind what they have in common is that each one has been imitated by a man-made counterpart. Each one is natural, but human beings have created their own imitations of them. There are artificial flowers, artificial intelligence, synthetic turf, faux fur, imitation leather, and artificial sweeteners. And in my mind none of the imitations are as good as the natural. The imitations share a lot of surface qualities with the natural, but in the end it is not the same.

We need to consider the fact this morning that another item may be added to that list which we may not have thought about. That item is worship. To God there is worship that is real and authentic and which pleases him, but there is also a manmade type of worship. It may share many similar outward appearances, but in the end, it simply is NOT the same. And it does not qualify as authentic worship and it does not please God. As we turn to 2 Samuel 6, we are presented with two different depictions of worship, and they have some commonalities, but one of the two clearly displeases God. Our focus today is on the worship that displeases God. Let’s read 2 Samuel 6:1-11.

[Read text and Pray]

This text is rich, rich, rich in content and instruction. It is riveting. It is breathtaking. It is shocking. It is grief-stricken. Yet, it is filled with exuberance and rejoicing. It teaches us important lessons about worship.

There are a lot things these days that pass under the guise of worship. But we should be asking the question, “Does what we are calling worship actually constitute true and genuine worship? Is it actually worship that is pleasing to God?” This text provides a robust answer to this all-important question. The way it does it is by providing, first, an account of worship that is revealed to be displeasing to God and, second, an account of worship that is revealed to be acceptable and gratifying to God. We will look this morning at the first of these. But before we go there, we need to set the stage.

After taking over the city of Jerusalem and establishing his home and his throne there, David determines to go and bring the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem as well. Here was a wooden box overlaid with gold, and it expressed and signified the presence and glory of God. David’s act of bringing the ark to Jerusalem is a declaration that the person and presence of Yahweh is at the heart of his kingdom. If Jerusalem is the location of the throne of the nation of Israel, then that is where the worship of the LORD must be. The ark in Jerusalem proclaims that God is in the midst of his people. And it communicates that God’s people thrive by seeking his presence.

The 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of 2 Samuel reveals to us two separate stages in the relocation of the ark. In the first stage we see an example of improper or displeasing worship. It’s not that every aspect of their worship was wrong. We actually observe a number of characteristics that are legitimately associated with worship. But in the end, God was displeased. The anger of the Lord was kindled. And the LORD burst forth against a man who intended well. The whole procession came to a halt and the

ark was left for three months. We will observe marks of worship which although not wrong in fact turn out NOT to be marks of authenticity. And we will see a mark or two which invalidate the very thing which worship is intended to accomplish—to please God.

The very first mark we see is . . .

### **I. A Large Crowd.**

There was a large gathering of people. Verse 1 indicates that David gathered “all the chosen men of Israel.” There must have been representatives from all of the tribes. This was a monumental moment and no less than thirty thousand men were gathered to process together to Jerusalem. Quantities of people can engender excitement, particularly when they are gathered for a common purpose. When those of us men have gone to T4G in the past with 10 - 15,000 men there the atmosphere is electric. Excitement and anticipation grips you just by being among the crowd. If you have ever been to a Packer game or a college football game where the crowd may have numbered as many as 80,000, as you walk toward the stadium, you hear crowd noise even from far away and your emotions begin to rise.

Considering the mass of individuals who gathered to process with the ark to Jerusalem, it is instructive to consider how it was known that there were 30,000? There must have been a count! Someone took the time to find out how many were there. And that tells us something. Perhaps there was pride in the number. In my first church years ago there was one of those numerical boards that was kept on the wall. It listed how many were present in Sunday School and how many had been present in worship and how much offering had been received. And I really appreciated the spirit of one of our ladies who advocated for taking the board down. She declared, “it is a source of pride or discouragement.” It does not have to be, but it is often true of statistical data.

The thing for us to take away from the count there in Baale-judah is that the amount of people gathered did not equate with genuine worship. And we need to have the same attitude. We must not be led to believe that the enthusiasm that is fed by larger numbers automatically translates into genuine worship. It may translate into excitement, but that excitement is dependent on the presence of humans not upon the presence and genuine worship of God. So don't be persuaded by numbers. Don't be focused on numbers. Churches do lots of things to try and draw a crowd, but that does not mean the worship pleases God. Jesus said that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” And isn't that the main thing—that Lord is pleased to present himself in the midst of the worship?

With that we come to a second mark of this gathering that in itself must not be equated with genuine worship. We see they had . . .

### **II. A Bold Purpose.**

This crowd had a stated purpose that seemed to align with the purpose of God. They came together to bring the ark up from Baale-judah to Jerusalem. It was an honorable purpose, and they were clear about their intention. But in the end it was not accomplished because of the short-coming we are going to see. But for now, let's just admit that stating that it is your purpose to do a good thing and actually accomplishing the purpose you are stating are indeed two separate things. We can speak all day long and say that we are worshiping. However, it does not amount to worship just because that is what we say we are doing.

Let's apply that. If you take out your bulletin and look at the middle panel of the inside, you will see a category entitled “Events this Week.” If you look down to Sunday, June 25, you will see that next Sunday at 10:15 am we are scheduled to have “Corporate Worship.” And we call the meeting that

we are in the midst of right now "Corporate Worship" and that is our stated goal. But that does not mean that what is going on right now is authentically worship. There is more to it than stating it as our purpose. It starts with our purpose, but carrying out that purpose is a matter of actually in this moment loving the Lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind. It is actually surrendering ourselves to exalt him with our active expressions of praise and worship and submission of ourselves to him according to His will for us.

So my exhortation to you in light of this point is to urge you to test yourself. Test your profession of worship. Don't assume that just because you call it worship and just because you say you are worshiping that worship is actually what you are doing. I see and hear a lot of stuff these days that goes under the guise of the worship of God that is clearly the exaltation of man and a ministry to the emotions of man; it misses the mark of the worship of God. And I admit to you that sometimes I am not all-in the way I should be. We all need to test ourselves according to what we say, what we profess. God, help us to fulfill in a glorifying way the desire and objective we have to truly worship you!

And so we come next to a third mark of the failed worship of the multitude of Israelites as they began to transport the ark up to Jerusalem.

### **III. A Professed Theology.**

They had a bold profession of God but lacked a corresponding knowledge of him. They had a bold profession of God but lacked a corresponding knowledge of him. Look in verse 2. Their profession was that the ark of God was "called by the name of the LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim."

I plan in a few weeks to preach a message that examines the ark of God, but for now let us simply note that as this crowd speaks about the ark, they speak about God. They espouse that he is the LORD of hosts. It is the name Yahweh, translated as "the LORD" in all caps. He is the self-existent one who depends on no one; he is the eternal one who is the I am; and he is the redeeming God. The "hosts" refer particularly to the armies of heaven. He is the self-existing God over the armies of heaven, and everything and everyone is subject to him.

Furthermore, he sits enthroned on the cherubim. This reference points to the sovereignty and majesty of God. He is elevated above all not only in power but also in glory. He is Holy! Holy! Holy! His very presence causes mountains to quake and thresholds to shake and human beings to tremble. He transcends our understanding and brings us to an awareness of our finitude and vulnerability. And he must be taken seriously. Fear and trembling and a sort of dread are appropriate responses to the being of God. This is what in those few words these folks were declaring.

Theirs was a bold declaration, but they missed the weight of what they were saying. When we possess an accurate sense of the holiness of God, it will grip us. We will respond like Isaiah responded in Isaiah 6 that "Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Even if you are saved and you find your identity in Christ and by definition you are a saint, a deepening grasp of the holiness of God will render you so awe-fully aware of his purity that it will bring you to your knees in worship and humility. And this is a glorious and joyful though fearful place to be. The people gathered there that day had a bold profession of God, but they lacked a corresponding sense of his holiness. And as a result they took the Lord lightly and their worship was flawed.

Brothers and sisters, we need a sense and understanding of the holiness of God that corresponds to what we say of him. We sing "Holy, Holy, Holy," but do we feel it? Do we know it? Do we realize that although God is loving and merciful and gracious, he is infinite, he is majestic, he is breathtakingly pure, he is terrifyingly just, and uncompromisingly devoted to his own glory? He is exalted and we dare NOT trifle with him.

The Israelites gathered there that day were missing this, but it was all about to change. We turn next to . . .

#### **IV. A Festive Atmosphere.**

Here is a fourth mark of this procession to Jerusalem that we must avoid equating with authentic worship. If you look down to verse 5, you will observe that there was a whole lot of enthusiasm among the people. It was loud. It was festive. It was emotional. It was musical. It was percussive. The text says, "And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals." The music was lively. The songs were exuberant. But the worship was lacking.

I don't need to say a whole lot here. I think the point that should be made is that exuberance does not equate with true worship. You can have all the instruments, all the noise, great singing, everyone hands raised, and all that, but it can still come way short of truly honoring God. Now I am not saying that true worship will NOT be exuberant, that authentic worship is slow, boring, and cold. No! But we should never equate God-pleasing worship with exuberance alone.

And that brings us to that aspect their worship that destroyed everything else that was involved. There was . . .

#### **V. A Manmade Component**

The people substituted man-made methods in the place of what God prescribed. The narrator tells us (v. 3) that they carried the ark of God on a new cart. This is a glaring departure from the clear instruction God had given as to how the ark was to be transported. It was to be carried by the Kohathites on the shoulders—no touching, no looking, no cart. The warning was also clear. They were not to touch the ark lest they die (Numbers 4:4-6, 15, 17-20; 7:9). In direct opposition to the command of the Lord, the ark was placed into a cart. Why do you think they did so? Was it easier? Probably. Could they move along faster? Indeed. After all, it was not an old cart but a new one. No doubt it made sense to put the ark in a cart. But it was disobedience to the Lord and it showed a lack of regard for His holiness. And wouldn't you know it? The oxen carrying the cart stumbled and the cart tottered and Uzzah, not wanting the ark to fall into the dirt reached out his hand and steadied the ark. He touched it! And the anger of the Lord was kindled. Thus we see that no matter what all the externals are—you might have a crowd; you might boldly assert you are worshiping; you might have engaging music and lots of enthusiasm—all the appearances of great worship dissolve into sacrilege if we reject the will of God.

The rejection of God's instruction brought forth the wrath of God instead of his approval. I want you to notice something. Back in chapter 5 we saw the two defeats of the Philistines which the Lord provided for Israel. You might remember that in the first one, the Lord BROKE THROUGH his enemies. Now, here the Lord is breaking forth on his own people. And the reason is because they did not regard God as holy. They trifled with God. They thought they knew better than God how to handle such a holy thing as the ark which represented the presence of God among them.

Can you imagine the breathtaking shock that suddenly gripped the thousands who were processing toward Jerusalem? Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, and God himself broke out against

Uzzah like a flood and killed him on the spot . . . and he was trying to do God a favor!! And he died there beside the ark. Silence replaced the noise. Grief replaced the celebration. First anger and then fear snuffed out the happiness.

David became angry because the Lord had broken out at Uzzah. This is what men do when we allow the glory and holiness of God to be eclipsed in our minds. When God acts to defend his honor which we ourselves are compromising, our first response is anger. How dare He!! Sometimes when people who do not correctly view the character and nature of the Lord read passages like this, they do one of a couple things. One, they become angry themselves. Or two, they determine they can't believe everything the Bible says. Or maybe three, they say, "Oh. That's the God of the OT, but now that Jesus has come God is love." They do not like it. The actual character of God conflicts with the god that exists in their minds. That God would never kill someone like this.

But what this text should do for us is confirm our confidence that the Bible is indeed true, that the Bible was not written by some people trying to derive a God that would provide comfort and happiness for poor weaklings of people who just can't live happily with out believing in a god. If that was the intention of the Bible writers, then they really messed up right here.

But if this book is breathed out by God telling us not what sinful people would like to believe about God but who he truly is, then this text is telling us that God is holy; his ways are higher than ours; and we dare not trifle with him. It is a dangerous thing to come near to God without regarding who he is as he is. It is a fearful thing to be exposed to the holiness of God. He was not arbitrary and unpredictable here. No. He gave clear warnings of what would happen if someone put out his hand upon the ark. That was kind of him and shows that he is not devious. But he is true to himself. And without our being true to himself, we corrupt the very worship we think we are offering.

There was another breathtaking incident that occurred back in the day when the holiness of God was compromised by two brothers. The sons of Aaron at the very commencement of their priestly service made the grave error of offering up incense not according to the Lord's instruction. And as they were doing so, fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them and they died before the Lord. Aaron was tempted to lash out at the Lord, but Moses said to him, "This is what the Lord has said: Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified." God is holy. Do not think you can please God in worship when your thoughts of him are that he is "the man upstairs," or that he is like a grandfather who just tolerates anything his grandchildren do. Do not think that you can please God by disobeying his word because you know better.

The final aspect of the displeasing worship that we see here is that it came to a halt. There was . . .  
**VI. An Abandonment of God.**

David became afraid of God and said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?" So he was not willing to take the ark of the LORD into the city of David. It remained in the house of Obed-edom for 3 months. When worship falls short of what pleases God, it grows empty and purposeless. We stop. Until we have the Lord at the proper place and his will in our hearts, the song will be silent.

When we gather for worship, we are coming near to the LORD. It SHOULD BE an exuberant and joyful time. We should be energetic and focused. We should sing loud and strong. But there must be a keen awareness of the will of God in our worship. He is concerned that we rightly view him, that we regard his holiness, that we tremble before him and yet with joy. In fact the greatest joy and gladness and exuberance we can know in worship is the joy that arises from hearts that are full

first of the transcendent purity of God, of the fact that his ways are not our ways, of leaning not on our own understanding but in all our ways acknowledging him and then realizing that this God who is holy, holy, holy is also a God who has mercy, who loves, and who forgives. Those who tremble before him are also those whose rejoicing and celebration is pleasing in his sight.

### **Conclusion**

I will end by lifting high the name of Jesus. The holiness of God highlights the fact that God must and will punish sin. Sin is the defiance of God's law. Sin says to God "I don't know why God said it should not be done this way, I have a better way." Sin thinks my hands a purer than dirt. But our hands extend from impure hearts. Dirt never fails to do God's will. Sin clouds our minds from the glorious holiness and majesty of the LORD. Sin is an affront to holy God. He sent His Son Jesus, however, to step between us and the breaking out of God's holiness against us. On the cross the wrath and righteous anger of God broke out upon Jesus that we might be shielded from eternal death and be made pleasing to God. What a glorious manifestation of holiness and mercy. If you have not bowed to him through faith in Jesus, I plead with you to do so today. If you have, then give him fresh glory, give him fresh praise, then give him your life afresh.