

## **Introduction**

Have you ever picked up a cup convinced of what you would be drinking and it turned out to be something else? I did that one time thinking I was about to taste good ole southern sweet tea. And I can't remember what it actually was, but all I could think when the liquid hit my tongue was that something was desperately wrong and I had to expel the liquid from my mouth. Well, worship can be that way for God. We may come to him professing to worship. But many times it is quite distasteful for him, and it turns out to be distasteful for us as well. But there is a worship that tastes just right to the Lord. We are going to examine the qualities of that worship this morning.

[Read text and Pray]

Last time we looked at the first half of chapter 6. There we saw a tragic and breathtaking culmination to the first stage of relocating the ark of God from Baale-judah to Jerusalem. There were marks of exuberance and excitement. There was a large crowd. There was a bold statement of purpose. There was a professed theology. There was a festive atmosphere. However, as God-pleasing worship goes, it was defective. The LORD was displeased. This was because there was a man-made and man-centered component. The instruction of the Lord was ignored in favor of placing the ark in a cart. And the warning of the Lord not to touch the ark itself was violated as Uzzah reached out his hand to steady it. The Lord had said that touching the ark would result in death. Uzzah, no doubt, thought he was doing God a favor by keeping the ark from falling into the dirt, but he was touching it with hands that belonged to a sinful man. The failure to follow the will of God and take God's holiness seriously resulted in Uzzah's death.

The celebration stopped. David became angry and then afraid. The procession stopped. The ark was left at the house of Obed-edom for three months. We are given a critical education about worship that fails to please God. It does not matter how big the crowd. It does not matter how bold the purpose. It does not matter how strong a statement of theology you may make if you do not know what you are saying. It does not matter how festive it is. If we do not tremble at God's word and regard him as holy, we may call it worship, but it is unfit for his majesty; it is unacceptable to God; and it displeases him. In short it is not authentic worship. We might call it worship, but it is a synthetic substitute for which the Lord has no regard. And so the first stage of the transition of the ark to Jerusalem demonstrates for us how NOT to worship the Lord.

We turn this morning to stage two. After a three month hiatus, the journey resumes. This time the ark completes the journey. Again I want you to observe various marks of the worship and this time we will be able to assert that this is worship with which God is pleased. It is a model for our own worship of God.

The very first mark we see is . . .

### **I. A Corrected Understanding of God (Theology)**

Looking back, we saw that the Israelites on the procession had a strong theological statement. They professed to worship the "LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim." They professed a high level of divine majesty, but their knowledge did not accord with their profession. They compromised the word of God. When God's holiness manifested itself in the death of Uzzah, they were all shocked. David was first angry and then afraid, so much so that the procession stopped and they left the ark right there.

David's anger is a reaction which indicates that the glory and holiness of God had been eclipsed in his mind. Whatever his sense of the holiness of God had been, it was deficient. For the moment David found fault with the Lord for defending his honor. However, upon further reflection, David's anger turned to fear. He was afraid of the LORD that day. David had witnessed the jealousy of the Lord for his name and reputation. And it scared him. There is a certain amount of fear and dread that should attend us as we approach the Lord. Whenever we see in scripture a manifestation of God's holiness, those who are witness to it are overcome with breathtaking and fearful wonder at the least. The scriptures insist that "the fear of the LORD" is the beginning of wisdom.

But after three months David's understanding of God was corrected. What happened was the word began to spread about Obed-edom. The Lord was blessing Obed and all his household and everything that belonged to him. How was this? Uzzah had died, and now Obed flourished with blessing? David was learning experientially that while the Lord is holy and must be worshiped in a spirit of humility and reverence, he is also a God who abundantly blesses those who approach him rightly. Perhaps David recalled what the Lord had declared to Moses. He is "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Sure, if you trifle with God, look out. But if you honor him and revere him and fear him as you draw near, he will bless. Psalm 1 puts it this way: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water who yields its fruit in its season and his leaf does not wither.

God's blessing of Obed-edom reminded David that God is not capricious. He is holy, and yet he is ready to bless. And the way to respond to the holiness of God is not to flee away from him but to draw near with the befitting approach. In Isaiah 66:2, the LORD says, "This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word." So it is that David, with an adjusted and corrected theology, goes to the house of Obed-edom to bring up the ark to Jerusalem. And this time he is successful. Here is a mark of God-pleasing worship. It holds fast on the one hand to the fearful holiness of God. On the other hand, it holds fast to God's mercy and grace.

Evangelical culture is only too quick to stress the love and mercy and grace of God. It tends to promote a worship that displeases God because it takes him lightly. But on the other end of the spectrum, there are also those whose focus is on the holiness and fearfulness of God such that they become severe and hostile. Joy is squelched. Joyful worship with which the Lord is pleased comes before him with a consciousness of his holiness but also with a confidence that he is gracious and will bless those who draw near with a humble and contrite heart.

Do you want the blessing of God in your life? Then seek God. Honor him as holy and trust in Him who is full of mercy and lovingkindness. Seek him. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. And know this—that to delight yourself in the Lord is to have desires that can only be satisfied with God. Spend time with him; yearn for him. Draw near to the Lord and he will draw near to you.

Do you ever look at the blessings that others are experiencing in their lives and wish that could be you? Well, it seems here that is what was going on with David! He had abandoned the Lord at the home of Obed-edom, and then he learned that the Lord was blessing Obed and he wanted the blessing in Jerusalem as well. Know this: God made you to be you and he made you to enjoy the

blessing of his presence but ONLY by drawing near to him. Do not expect the joy of the Lord to flood your soul if you are keeping your distance from God.

We come then to a second mark of worship that pleases God ...

### **II. A Corrected Course of Action.**

In stage one of relocating the ark, the people leaned on their own understanding and used a cart to transport it. However, now that the Lord has reminded the people of the seriousness and wisdom of his commands, they have corrected their approach. It is rather subtle, but if you look down to verse 13, the text points out that it was not a cart which bore the ark. No, but there were THOSE who bore the ark and THEY took steps.

God is pleased when sinners repent. He is delighted when we correct our disobedient patterns. God hates sin, but he loves sinners. He loves the worst kind of sinners who are willing to admit their disobedience and change their ways. There is not a more touching illustration of the willingness of God to receive sinners than the parable of the prodigal son. As most of you know, this is the teaching story Jesus told to show us what real repentance looks like and how God responds to it. The younger of two sons sought his inheritance BEFORE his father's death. The father gave it to him and he left home. He went away and lived riotously and spent the last dime of the inheritance. Now destitute he was lowered to the point of feeding pigs. It was then that he came to himself. He realized he would be so much better off if only he could be just a servant in his father's house. He realized he had sinned grievously against his father, but he knew what kind of man his father was. Surely he would take him back if only as a servant. So he left the pig farm and went back home with a repentant heart. He was ready with his speech. He would say to his father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." That, brothers and sisters, is a repentant heart. It admits its wrongdoing, regrets it, and turns from it. It is ashamed and knows itself unworthy. But with sorrow it turns to the only place help can be found—to the Lord Himself.

And here is the father showing us how the LORD of hosts responds to those who repent. While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran, and embraced him and kissed him. They began the celebration of a lifetime because the son was now restored. Listen, worship that pleases God flows from a heart that turns from sin. But rejoices because part of the glory of God is that he forgives and restores.

This is how conversion takes place. It begins with repentance. It begins with a recognition that we have sinned. The soul is filled with shame, regret, sorrow. Sin is now despised. The repentant soul turns away from self-dependence and fleshly self-satisfaction. It turns to Christ who alone can cleanse a sin-darkened heart. Have you repented and turned to trust in Jesus? If not, there is no better time than right now.

So David had a corrected theology and a corrected course of action. Next we see ...

### **III. A Fitting Offering of Sacrifice.**

Verse 13 informs us that when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six steps, David sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. More than likely it was a priest who offered the sacrifice under David's headship. The death of Uzzah had a strong impact upon David. He is now conscious that while you do not trifle with God, you may enjoy his blessings by his mercy and grace, and it needs to be acknowledged. And so with the Levites having properly carried the ark no more than a mere six-steps, David says, "Let's stop. Let's worship. Let's acknowledge God's goodness and mercy."

And the expression of worship is sacrifice. Sacrifices recognize the need for forgiveness, the requirement for atonement if worship is to be acceptable to God. They acknowledge that we are unworthy to offer acceptable worship—that even the worship we offer falls short of the glory of God and needs to be covered with the blood of sacrifice to be acceptable. God’s institution of the tabernacle as the center of worship was designed to instruct human beings that the worship of God by sinful man cannot take place without sacrifice. The worship of God involves atonement for sin and rejoicing in reconciliation with Holy God. David’s offering in the midst of this worshipful procession is a clear declaration that one of the marks of worship that pleases God is that it glories in atonement, in divine mercy, and in reconciliation. It glories in forgiveness.

It should be no wonder at all then that on this side of Jesus Christ, our every act of worship, our every service of worship is fixated on Jesus Christ. Hebrews 9 beautifully sets forth the superiority of Christ’s work over all other sacrifices. It states “when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ ... purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” We cannot rightly worship God without worshiping and exalting the person, the work, and the name of Jesus Christ. Our worship is completely unacceptable to God apart from Christ’s work of sacrifice. Whether we sing or preach or present ourselves to God as living sacrifices— whatever we do in the worship of God—let us always and enthusiastically do so rejoicing in Christ Jesus.

So, God-pleasing worship has a right theology, a heart of repentance, and rests in the sacrificial work of Jesus. Next, we also see ...

#### **IV. An Observable Display of Exuberant Rejoicing.**

There are several indications of exuberant joy in this second phase of relocating the ark. Verse 12 says David brought up the ark ... with rejoicing. With his corrected theology, he was now even more amazed and overjoyed in light of the holiness of God. And now with the offering of a sacrifice, David begins dancing before the Lord. The text says he danced before the Lord with all his might. Verse 16 indicates that he was leaping and dancing before the Lord. And there was more. Verse 15 states that David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

A couple points should be made in light of all this ecstatic rejoicing. First, a right fear of the Lord does not squelch exuberance. In fact it inflames exuberance. With all that was going on in the first stage, nothing was said of David dancing. And now here he is dancing with all his might. Clearly David is emotional. Clearly, he is exuberant. Clearly, he can hardly contain his joy. You want to worship like David? Here is an all important key: know God. Indulge in the magnificence of who he is. It was in light of the increase of the knowledge of God that David’s intensity of expression increased as worship that pleased God. It was not augmented by repeating a chorus over and over or with musical manipulation. That is artificial worship. No, it was worship because his heart and mind were overflowing with the truth of who God is. The better you know him the more dynamic will be your expressions of delight in him.

A second point to be made is that worship should be exuberant. It should not be contrived. It must be real and genuine. But we should engage in worship in such depth that we mean, for example, what we are singing, that we are pondering the greatness of our God, and we cannot be silent. We

cannot be cold. We cannot bear to be lifeless. And we sure should not restrain ourselves to keep our emotions at bay. A mark of worship that pleases God is not that it is based upon emotions, but IT IS emotional. Let us not fabricate emotions to convince ourselves that we are worshiping, but let us seek God with all our hearts, and believe and embrace the truths of the gospel. And in that light let us rejoice as we express our praise to the Lord.

Now, notice mark number 5. A fifth mark of God-pleasing worship is ...

#### **V. A Humble Offering to God Alone.**

The narrator wants us to note what David was wearing on this glorious occasion. He was wearing a linen ephod. This garment was a simple robe worn by the priests. You may remember that the narrator specified that as a boy Samuel wore a linen ephod as he ministered before the Lord. The point of mentioning the ephod is not to say David was dressed up but that he was dressed down. He wasn't dressed in his royal robes but with the simple apron-like garment of a priest or a servant.

David's dancing and David's attire led Michal, the daughter of Saul, to scorn David. Commentator Dale Ralph Davis alerts us to notice that the narrator refers to Michal three times as the daughter of Saul (verses 16, 20, and 23). It is totally unnecessary to repeat the designation without some reason. So it seems that the narrator wants us—the readers—to understand that Michal's voice represents the mindset of her father, the former king. Saul was consumed with appearances. He wanted to look kingly before the people. He was more concerned about how he appeared than how he behaved. The same concern for royal appearance was in the heart of Michal, the daughter of Saul. When she saw David dancing and leaping before the Lord, she despised David. Then when she met him that evening, she said sarcastically, "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!" David was not, as some have supposed, dancing around in his birthday suit. Michal did not like that David, who was dressed as an ordinary or vulgar fellow, was not exhibiting his royalty.

David's response to Michal reveals where his heart was. He was not showing-off. He was not drawing attention to himself. He was not dancing and shouting and dressing for an audience of humans. No; "it was before the Lord." He was making merry before God. It was shameless because there was nothing to be ashamed of. David was not parading as a king who in arrogance thought himself better than everybody else. He was not concerned about keeping up appearances before people. He was determinedly consumed with the goodness and glory and mercy of God. And that is the way David was going to live. He realized that this would not be the last time Michal would be embarrassed by his humility. But with those of humble state, his humility would be appreciated.

David was not attempting to attract the attention of onlookers to be impressed with him. He was singularly consumed with humbling himself before God. David wasn't putting on a show so the people would be impressed by him. He was humbling himself before the Lord.

True and pleasing worship of God is focused on God. We have a three-person audience, and it is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The question that guides God-honoring worship is this: what pleases God? However, it is common among evangelical churches in our day to ask different questions. They ask, "what will draw a crowd?" or "what will bring the people back?" "What will get us all excited?" "What will impress the Michal's of the world?" Pursuits along those lines may draw crowds of people, but they fail to consider whether it will draw the presence and glory of God. There is one driving consideration for our corporate worship gatherings. It can be asked in various ways: Are we

pleasing God? Are we concerned for the glory of God? Are we worshiping as “before the Lord”? Are we humbling ourselves? Or could it be that we are exalting ourselves? God forbid!

### **Conclusion**

I mentioned Nadab and Abihu last week. They were sons of Aaron and were the first priests to serve under him. Perhaps they should be known as the sons of consuming fire. In their first and last stint as priests, fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them. We should want to know why. And the reason is that God gave explicit instructions for the composition and offering of incense. And they failed to follow those instructions. The Bible says they offered “unauthorized fire.” God was dishonored by the two men, and he demonstrated that this is not how people are to worship. We get quite a different picture this morning as we detect delight in the heart of God. He is holy. Do not trifle with God. But he is merciful. Do not fail to receive the richest God has to give. He gives to those who worship him suitably.