

David: A Man After God's Own Heart

Lesson 8: Worship in Reverence and Joy: The Ark Comes Home -- 2 Samuel

6

It should have been the happiest day in the life of the nation. The ark of God, the golden chest that marked the very presence of the Lord among His people, had been neglected for years, sitting in a private house off in the countryside while Israel went about its business. Now David, newly settled as king, wanted it back at the center of the nation's life, back where it belonged. So he gathered thirty thousand chosen men and set off with music and singing to bring the ark home. They loaded it onto a brand-new cart, and the whole celebration rolled out toward Jerusalem with David and all Israel dancing before the Lord with all their might.

And then the music stopped. The oxen stumbled, the cart lurched, and a man named Uzzah, walking alongside, reached out his hand to steady the ark so it would not fall. It seems like the most natural thing in the world, even a reverent thing, an instinct to protect the holy object. But God struck him down on the spot, and Uzzah died there beside the cart, beside the ark, in the middle of the celebration. The singing died in everyone's throat. David was angry, and then David was afraid, and the great procession ground to a halt. How, David wondered, can the ark of the Lord ever come to me?

It is a hard story, and we should not rush past how hard it is. But the key to it is hidden in plain sight, back in the law of God. The ark was never to be carried on a cart, however new and well-meant. It was to be carried by the Levites, on poles, on their shoulders, exactly as God had said. The new cart was Israel's idea, borrowed in fact from the Philistines. They had approached the holy God with great enthusiasm and sincere hearts, and on their own terms instead of His. When David finally brings the ark up the right way, carried as God had commanded, the joy returns, and the king dances before the Lord with abandon, leaping and celebrating with all his might as the ark comes home at last.

This chapter holds two truths together that we are always tempted to pull apart. On one side, God is holy, and He cares deeply about how He is approached. Worship is not something we get to invent; it is a response we bring to God on the terms He has revealed, with reverence and godly fear. On the other side, true worship is not cold or stiff or joyless. The same David who learned to fear God at Uzzah's side is the David who danced before the Lord with all his might, undignified and glad. Reverence and joy are not enemies. The God who will not be approached carelessly is the very God in whose presence there is fullness of joy, and this lesson invites us to worship Him with both holy fear and wholehearted gladness.

Group Discussion: Uzzah seems to have acted out of a sincere, even protective, instinct, yet God struck him down, and the whole celebration stopped. After reading the chapter, why do you think God responded so severely to what looks to us like a small and well-meant act? What does

this say about the difference between worship offered on our terms and worship offered on God's?

Personal Reflection: Think honestly about your own approach to worshiping God, whether in the assembly or in private. Has it drifted toward either extreme, a casual familiarity that has lost its sense of God's holiness, or a stiff formality that has lost its joy? Which way do you tend to lean, and why?

Read 2 Samuel 6

Study Questions

1. When Uzzah reached out and touched the ark, "God struck him down there for his error, and he died there beside the ark of God" (6:7). What does this sobering moment teach us about the holiness of God and about how seriously He takes the way He is approached and worshiped?
2. It is easy to grow casual with God, to lose the sense that we are approaching the holy Lord of heaven. Where has a sense of God's holiness faded in your own worship or daily walk, so that you approach Him carelessly or treat sacred things as common? What would it look like to recover a reverent fear of God?
3. Israel transported the ark on a new cart, sincerely and enthusiastically, but not the way God had commanded; the ark was to be carried by the Levites on poles (6:3; compare Exodus 25:14; Numbers 4:15; 7:9). What does this teach us about the difference between worship that is merely sincere and well-intentioned and worship that is offered according to God's revealed will?
4. We can be completely sincere and still be wrong if we approach God on our own terms rather than His. Where might you be assuming that good intentions and enthusiasm are enough, without asking what God has actually said about how He wants to be worshiped and obeyed? How does this challenge the idea that sincerity alone is what counts?
5. After Uzzah's death the ark rested in the house of Obed-edom, and "the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household" (6:11). What does this teach us about the same holy God who must be approached carefully, that His presence, rightly received, is not a threat but a blessing?
6. The presence of God brought death to Uzzah but blessing to Obed-edom's house. As you consider your own life, do you tend to think of God's nearness mainly as something to fear or as something to welcome? How might holding both reverence and gladness together change the way you live in God's presence this week?
7. When the ark was finally brought up rightly, "David danced before the LORD with all his might," celebrating with abandon (6:14–15). What does this teach us that the same chapter shows both the holy fear of God and David's exuberant, wholehearted joy? How do reverence and joy belong together in true worship rather than canceling each other out?
8. Some of us worship God with reverence but little joy, while others worship with enthusiasm but little reverence. Which is more natural for you, and which do you most need to grow in?

What would it look like for your worship to hold genuine awe and genuine gladness together?

9. When Michal despised David for dancing before the Lord, he answered that he would celebrate before the Lord who had chosen him, and would be even more undignified than this (6:20–22). What does David’s willingness to look foolish in worship, caring more about honoring God than about his own dignity, teach us about the heart God seeks? And since David lived under the Old Covenant, how do we today discern the way God has revealed that He wants to be worshiped under the New Covenant, offering Him both reverence and joyful, obedient worship?
10. Look back across the whole chapter, the stopped procession, the blessed household, and the dancing king. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this account of the ark coming home. What is the single truth about worshiping God, in reverence and in joy, that you most need to carry into this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 12:28–29, offering God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for “our God is a consuming fire”; John 4:23–24, the Father seeking those who worship Him in spirit and truth; Psalm 16:11, in God’s presence “there is fullness of joy”; Leviticus 10:1–3, Nadab and Abihu offering unauthorized fire and the warning that God will be regarded as holy; Psalm 95:1–7, joyful singing joined with bowing down before the LORD our Maker