

September 25, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: The Life of David
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2016 David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from 2 Samuel 6:1-11

1. What did God's law require as the prescribed way to transport the ark of God?
2. What did the ark of God represent?
3. Was it wrong for David and the people to be emotionally charged over moving the ark?
4. What lessons about worshiping God does this story teach?

GOOD IDEA; BAD METHODOLOGY **2 Samuel 6:1-11**

It's a good idea for you to regularly get in your automobile and negotiate the streets of our city in order to go to the store to pick up some groceries to feed your hungry family. It's a bad idea to do it at 70 miles per hour. You live in a culture that has laws about that.

It's a good idea to give an offering to the Lord's work when you gather with God's people to worship Him at a local church service. It's a bad idea to rob your neighbor to provide for that offering. Not only does your culture have rules about that, but so does the God you propose to worship.

It is a good idea to tell people about God's plan of salvation. But it's a bad idea to tell people that they can get into God's plan through their own efforts. You can get into a retirement plan through

your own efforts. You can get into an exercise or diet plan through your own efforts. But God, who created the wonderful plan of eternal salvation, established some very specific rules about how you have that eternal life. His rule is that He Himself has provided the price to pay for the penalty of sins. He exacted the price from God the Beloved Son who wicked men crucified and buried. God raised Him from the dead and offers eternal life to every sinner who acknowledges his or her sin and trusts that God did indeed provide the payment for their sins.

If we tell other people that the good news is that they can have eternal life through their own good works, they are going to face some serious consequences. Living for eternity in unspeakable anguish is a pretty serious consequence. Telling the good news of the gospel is a great idea. Telling it contrary to God's instruction is eternally deadly.

David's idea of moving the ark of God to Jerusalem was a wonderful idea. However, somewhere in the planning stages, David forgot to read God's instruction. Was it oversight? Was it carelessness? Was it stubborn pride in which he concluded he knew better? Whatever the reason for failure, David's oversight caused a man's death and much sorrow for the people.

The good news is that when David finally decided to do a good thing God's way, there was much rejoicing and thanksgiving. But then, even in doing the right thing in the way God prescribed, David got a bit careless. Carelessness with God's things is troublesome. What an accurate study in human relationships with a holy God David offers us. We have much to learn from his life about our relationship with God.

It's not a good idea to ignore God's instruction (vv.1-5).

Everyone was delighted to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem. *David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 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 (vv.1-2).*

As we can tell from the number of people mentioned in these verses, relocating the ark of God was a big deal. It had been at Kiriath-jearim for a long time. Let's back up and remember how the ark came to that place. In 1067 BC the Philistines captured the ark in battle (1 Samuel 5:1). Within a short time they returned the ark to Israel because God used it to humiliate the people for trusting in false gods. The ark then sat in Kiriath-jearim for about 20 years at the house of Abinadab where his son Eleazar watched over it (1 Samuel 7:1-2). By 1043 BC Saul became Israel's king. We know that one time he called for the ark to be brought to a battle (1 Samuel 14:18). But that must have been a temporary thing, for it appears that the ark of God remained at Kiriath-jearim throughout Saul's 32 year reign.

Notice that our text says the ark was at Baale-judah. That isn't the same as Kiriath-jearim, is it? According to Joshua 15:9 the town of Kiriath-jearim was also known as Baalah. It was located in Judah (hence Baale-judah) but was very close to the border with the Philistine nation. Therefore, the name Baale probably indicates that this was a Philistine high place where they once worshiped their gods.

The location of the ark near the Philistine border would be a very good reason for David to move the ark. As the Philistines had learned, the ark of God represented the presence of God. Their past experience had certainly driven that truth home. Now David had just defeated the Philistines twice, captured their idols which represented their false gods, and destroyed them. It would be expected that the Philistines were looking for a chance for payback. In light of that possibility, the ark was located precariously near the border with Philistia. Therefore, it was wise to move the ark of God to the stronghold of Jerusalem.

David made the arrangements, the day came to move the ark of God and it was a festive occasion. *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 (v.5)*. This was a good and expected response to moving the ark. God commended celebration especially when His people attended the annual feasts. In His law God required regarding the Feast of Booths, *You shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month (Leviticus 23:41)*. The word for celebrate in this

command means to dance or make merry. God is not opposed to His people being happy or expressing joyful emotions.

However, that may not be exactly what was going on as the people tried to move God's ark. The word translated *making merry* in our text (and in verse 21), means more than to be merry. It is found 36 times in the Old Testament. Once it is used in a very similar setting as the circumstances of our story, when the maidens danced and sang about David killing tens of thousands (1 Samuel 18:7). But the majority of the time the word carries negative connotations. In the context of making merry, this word can describe unrestrained celebration. In that sense, most of the time the word means to mock, to make sport. That is what the Philistines did when they brought out blind Samson to make sport of him and to mock him. Or the word is even used to describe God laughing in scorn at the wicked who reject Him (Psalm 37:13).

Therefore, we are left with a question about the actions and expressions of David and the people in this situation. At first blush we want to call it worship because the people were singing or at least making songs on instruments typically used in worship (lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, cymbals). But we also know that music can be used to heighten the emotions of the moment. In light of this thought, it does seem like David and the people were a bit reckless in this celebration, which should not be confused with worship.

At the same time, music can serve to calm emotions as when David played the harp for disturbed Saul. It is a known fact and a common practice for stores or restaurants that deal with lines of people to govern the speed of those lines with music. Research shows that if things are slowing down, picking up the pace of the music will speed them up. Of course most casual restaurants play whatever kind of music the manager likes. As for me, if I want to relax I will listen to Bach not Rock. I respond especially well to Bach's Brandenburg Concerto. Some people don't. It does seem doubtful that the music that day the people moved the ark was anything like Bach. It was an exciting, happy day. It was a carefree day.

No one seemed to consider God's instruction for transporting the ark. *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, with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark (vv.3-4).

There was no reason for ignorance about how to transport this very special piece of furniture. God's law required that His people treat the symbol of His presence with extreme respect. The ark of God was not just another piece of furniture in the tabernacle. God promised Moses that He would meet him above the mercy seat at the ark in the holy of holies (Exodus 25:22). So holy was this setting that if anyone other than Moses (and later the high priest) entered into God's presence at the ark, God would kill them (Leviticus 16:2).

Because the ark represented such holiness, such separateness from the common and from sin, it was designed to be carried by two poles inserted in four gold rings (Exodus 25:12-15). This was to prevent anyone from touching it and risking death. God warned, *"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"* (Numbers 4:15). In fact, even when the designated carriers (the descendants of the Koathite Levites) carried the ark, they covered it with multiple layers of goatskins and blue covers (Numbers 4:5-6).

To say that God gave precise and specific instruction about how to handle this symbol of His presence is an understatement.

It is easy for us to wonder in our day, "Why all the details?" Maybe David and his people asked the same kind of question. The reason for the detailed instruction and warning was because the ark represented God's presence. God is holy and therefore must be treated with greatest respect and honor. He is not like anyone or anything else in the world. That one truth more than any other truth is taught by the specifics of the Mosaic law and demonstrated in the detailed and precise sacrifices.

If God's people in David's day should have understood one thing about God, it was that He is not common, not at all like anything else in their world. Therefore, the people's relationship with God and interactions with God and His things should have demonstrated special concern to magnify the symbol of His presence.

So too, while we rejoice in being God's people, we never want to forget that He is holy. One of Satan's most insidious and popular lies today is that God is common, ordinary, cool, hip and your good buddy. God never desires to fit in with people who are plagued by a sin nature and whose hearts are deceitful and terribly sick. God's desire is to take us out of our sinful condition and make us like Him. God isn't about to change to become like us, but we need to change and become like Him.

Our relationships with God and our interactions with Him and His things ought to demonstrate change, distinction, difference with what we once were and, therefore, with that which is common and ordinary in our world. But we deal with the age-old problem that familiarity breeds contempt. Uzzah and Ahio had been around the ark most of their lives. It was in their house for nearly 50 years. Had they ever accidentally brushed against it with no consequences? Therefore, they might have concluded that there was no need to get so picky and apply all those old rules and traditions regarding the ark. Kind of like how a modern generation of professing Christians respond to literal interpretations of the Bible. "Why be so picky?" they wonder.

Not only could there have been an issue of ignorance, but there was also a precedence for transporting the ark by cart. Over 50 years earlier, the Philistines sent the ark back to the Israelites on a new cart. Everything seemed to work out fine, right? Not exactly. In that setting, God killed 70 men of Beth-shemesh for acting like He was ordinary and not holy when they looked in the ark. God didn't punish the Philistines for touching the ark because they were pagans. Pagans don't live under the same rules as God's people. They are people who don't know God. Therefore, we expect them to act like everyone else in the world who does not understand that God is holy. God fully expects unregenerated people, sinful people to treat Him with disrespect because they don't know Him.

If you are a born again believer things are different for you. God expects you to know what He is like and live like it. That is why God tells us, *For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8)*. That kind of living is possible only as we, *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded (James 4:8)*. That is just God's rule for His

people. And we say we are too busy, it doesn't matter, or other people who seem to be doing pretty well don't take time to draw near to God. We leave the poles out of the ark assuming it really doesn't matter. And then life begins to unravel because we are far from God.

We often understand too late why God gave instruction (vv.6-11).

A tragedy occurred because of failure to follow God's instruction (vv.6-7). A man was put in a difficult situation because of disobedience. *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 (v.6).*

Uzzah was likely walking behind or at least beside the cart. A common problem occurred when the oxen stumbled a bit. Sometimes oxen will stumble on dirt paths. God knows that. And God who knows when little birds fall from their nests permits that. God permitted that oxen to stumble at that exact time at that exact spot. Instinctively, Uzzah reached out to steady the ark of God because he was really concerned that it would not be damaged. The ark of God was really important to Uzzah and all the thousands of people who were celebrating its move to Jerusalem. Sadly, it would appear that God of the ark was not all that important.

The man's error stirred God's anger. *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 (v.7).* This was not a case of God sitting up in heaven losing His temper because He was suddenly taken by surprise by Uzzah's bold and thoughtless action of touching His symbol. God was in complete control of this event and of His reactions to sin. The problem is that Uzzah was not in control, nor were the thousands of people who were more interested in celebrating than contemplating God.

In this situation, God chose to demonstrate that His warnings about not touching the ark were serious. He had done the same thing over fifty years earlier when the men of Beth-shemesh looked into the ark (1 Samuel 6:19). Probably Uzzah's act of steadying the ark of God was virtually unnoticed by the celebrants. But when Uzzah fell over dead, no doubt the music stopped, the dancing stopped, the celebration ended abruptly. It probably took a few moments for the

people to figure out what happened. Did Uzzah have a heart attack? Was it a seizure, a stroke, an aneurism? Word quickly spread that Uzzah, one of the men so privileged to care for the ark of God was dead. He was dead because he dared to touch the symbol of God's presence.

This very sad circumstance created a good time for reflection (vv.8-11). Now David was angry. *And David was angry because the LORD had burst forth against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah, to this day (v.8).* God's wrath had been fired up. In a similar and yet different way, David was angry. He was incensed, grieved in his soul. He was angry because of what God did. David was like Jonah whose ire was stirred against God because God sent repentance to the Ninevites, the enemies of Israel (Jonah 3:10-4:4).

David was like us when God in His infinite wisdom doesn't let us have our way. He really thought he was doing a good thing. Then why would God mess up David's good intentions? How was it that God had "burst forth" against the enemy, the Philistines, but now God had "burst forth" against His own people? I wonder how long it took for David to figure out that he had led the people in disobedience to God's law in the way the tried to move God's ark.

David was not only angry, but certainly he was embarrassed by what happened. Moving the ark of God was his idea. Putting it in Jerusalem fit perfectly with God's idea of choosing the special city where His people would come to worship Him. But the wrong method for moving the ark had to at have David's approval. Now he was publicly humiliated for a wrong decision.

David was afraid. *And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?" (v.9).* Obviously, he felt confused. On the one hand, moving the ark was a good idea. On the other hand, he wondered how he was supposed to do that. Why was David ignorant of God's law? Was David ignorant of God's law? Our blind spots in our knowledge of God can cause us to be afraid of Him. David was missing a piece of the puzzle in his desire to do God's will.

Sometimes we just need to ask God to open our eyes so we can see what we are missing. God is not unkind, unfair, unjust, or capricious. God knows the beginning from the ending and knows where we lack in our relationship with Him. Sometimes God can

direct us and enlighten us simply by revealing a principle through His Word. Sometimes God really does seem to give us special understanding as thoughts just pop into our heads and then we say, “Oh, that was easy!” Sometimes God has to discipline us or correct us to help us understand that we are missing something. Solomon taught his son, “*My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights*” (Proverbs 3:11-12). The writer to Hebrew Christians applies the same truth to us. *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline* (Hebrews 12:6-7).

We must learn to identify God’s discipline in our lives. We must learn that God’s discipline is for our good. What is sadder than a child who fears his parent because his parent disciplined him?

Furthermore, it is obvious that David became disheartened. *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. 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* (vv.10-11). It is doubtful that David pouted. Proud and immature people pout when they can’t have their way or when they are embarrassed. It is quite sad when Christians respond by acting, “Well, if you won’t let me do what I want to do, then I won’t do anything.” Probably that isn’t how David responded. It is more likely that David was uncertain about what to do.

He could have solved the problem quite easily by resorting to God’s law about which he himself wrote. *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes*” (Psalm 19:7-8). The Bible has some great information for people who want to know God’s will.

Therefore, God could have said to David and could say to us on occasion what He told Cain, *The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its*

desire is for you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:6-7). David’s response notwithstanding, God blessed Obed-edom, just like He had blessed the house of Abinadab.

David’s miscue reminds us that the end never justifies the means in God’s work. God has specific instructions for how we serve Him. For example, “Walk in the light as He is in the light” is one simple bit of instruction that covers a lot of details. If we are not interested in serving God for His glory and therefore serving according to His instruction, we should not be surprised when things crash. We need to be careful to do the thing God ordains in the way God ordains it lest, at the very least, when we get to heaven we discover that we were doing God’s work for our own ease and glory. God does not tolerate us robbing Him of His glory for very long.