

Intro:

Well, we are on week two of our series "Visions of Worship"- a series looking at some key worship moments in the Bible, for the sake of becoming worshippers. We began last week by noting some basic and crucial truths about worship, truths you have seen already in our gathering today, truths that I think established how crucial this series was for all of us, regardless of where we are in the faith journey: 1) worship consists of two parts- seeing God as he really is, and responding properly with all that we have, 2) you and I were created for worship, meaning we do not really live, or do not become fully human, until we worship. Worship is essential to our existence, hence this series.

Our Bible passage and talk today is famous for both what it shows about God, and a person's (David) response. Seeing, Responding- that's how we're going to divide up our talk.

Some background, though, before we get into it.

David, one of the first kings of Israel (around 1010 BC, before Jesus' coming), has just conquered much of the land that was promised to them in the Old Testament. He has just united two halves of the kingdom, and relocated the capital to a new city called Jerusalem. He is going to make this the center of the new kingdom, and so it is only natural that he decides to bring the Ark of the Covenant to this city.

The ark of the covenant, of course, was the most sacred object in Israelite worship back then. Having been formed by direct command of God after the Exodus, it was actually a representation of God's throne (v.2)- on the top there were two angels facing each other, bowed, wings spread out- and the invisible God was pictured to manifest himself there (of course, God is everywhere, but there are times He reveals himself uniquely in a certain time and space moment. This was the case with the ark). The ark symbolized God's unique power and presence, and His unique relationship with Israel. To use a word we used last week- His glory. To have the ark with him and the country was to symbolically show that God was indeed with David and the country.

Now the question is, of course, why wasn't the ark with them in the first place? Turns out that the people of God had lost the ark earlier, in fact 60 years prior, lost it in the sense that God allowed another people to take it away from them. This was because the Israelites were deeply disobedient to God, and as a result the nation was allowed to be overrun by all sorts of people. 1 Sam. 4-6 talk all about it. And so we find the Ark in Baalah of Judah, at a man's house named Abinadab, about 10 miles away from Jerusalem. Our story picks up from here.

Let's read our text: 2 Samuel 6

What do we see about God?

Some of us probably immediately think: I see a God I don't want anything to do with. You may feel like David in this story- you are angry about this kind of God. But bear with me- I think there are some important, sobering, needed things to see here about God. And hear me out because I have no interest in trying to shove religion or hellfire or something like that down people's throats- I am trying my best just to present and explain the Bible as it is, to be honest and truthful with it. Two things I want to mention in terms of what we see about God:

God is not a tool for our glory or power.

David, you remember, is taking the ark to Jerusalem. It's real interesting in this story he doesn't pray about it, while in previous sections he prays about some of the key decisions he's making. This is not to say moving the ark, centralizing a kingdom, is a bad thing. But is David looking out for himself, or for God? My impression is, if you read through the wider section, at the moment he's using God for his own glory and power. But there's a second, more obvious thing about God:

God's ways are to be seriously considered and not taken lightly.

When the cart gets to a threshing floor- a place where they used to harvest grains- the cart carrying the ark stumbles, and Uzzah puts out his hand to steady it. But He dies for doing so! It seems random and terrible, but we learn from the other account of the same story in I Chronicles why this happens (this story is told twice in the Bible, for reasons we won't get into here) . It turns out that God had clearly prescribed a way for the ark to be moved- it was to be done by a group of people known as the priests. And it was to be done with carrying poles, not with ox and a cart (the ox/cart method was actually a way of moving things for other religions).

Check out: I Chr. 15:12-13, 15. Ex.25:12-15

God's ways are to be seriously considered and not taken lightly.

What this means: God is above us. He has authority, glory, power above us. We think we are above God- We use him, we decide what commands of his we want to keep and not keep. But God makes it clear in many instances, including this one here, that He is not going to be treated that way.

There's more that could be said, including even the fact that Jesus is like this and has difficult things to say- check out your extra notes (see excursus**). But I want to go on and point out a second even more crucial thing to see about God.

Yet God is ultimately about blessing and mercy.

We see this even in this sobering story: Obed Edom the Gittite gets blessed by the Ark (v.11-12). David somehow is able to dance still, and we discover he is able to do so because he realizes God's mercy and favor on him as a king (v. 21)

Even the ark itself, if you study more into it: the top of the ark was called the "mercy seat," and the ritual of forgiveness in the early Israelite religion was done there.

And of course, this is why Jesus came: to show us God's mercy in his living and his dying.

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5:8

Why talk about the dying? All of us are like David and Uzzah- we have taken God lightly before, and done things against him- this is what Sin is. But Jesus comes and dies so we don't have to die like Uzzah did, he takes our place. This is love.

And so we see that God is ultimately about blessing and mercy.

So how do we respond? How do we worship?

I think it's amazing because what we see how worship can be a process:

Anger- David starts here.

Fear and even distance: He moves on to here.

Dance! – But he gets somehow here.

But there are some deeper responses at work.

- There's the need to take God seriously, and **obey**. Not that we're going to be perfect. But if God is showing us something, putting something in front of us that we have to do, then let's obey, let's embrace what He wants. For some of us, this may be to actually begin to follow Him, to let go of our lives to Him.

- There's a need to **embrace humility**- to lose your sense of ego, pride and worry about what others think, and instead to just focus and worry about what God thinks.

Notice that the dance is done out of humility, and the whole thing about David wearing a linen ephod (something that looks like an apron) is about this. His wife's comments (v.20) are not necessarily pointing to David literally being half naked- remember she's pretty bitter here, and also I Chr. 15:27 will note that David is also wearing a robe, in a addition to the ephod. What probably happened here is that David, being a king, was not wearing His royal garments, but the garments of the priestly participants in this ceremony- usually pretty simple clothing- and danced with he commoners. It's not something very dignified, it can seem pretty lowly. But you know, David says- It was before God I did this (v.21) and hey, I will continue to be undignified, I will continue to humiliate and humble myself, I will continue to embrace humility, to care about God and not others opinions. Interestingly, Michal is all about judgment and critique, which stands in contrast with a humble heart, she's playing God.

This is our call, our response, our challenge, if we are to worship God aright. Obedience, Humility.

Response:

- Where do you need to obey?

- Where do you need to embrace humility? Let go of your control, let go of what others think, and just worry yourself with what God thinks?

Response: Open floor to deal with God. We had this last week, and we're going to have it again. And we're doing this because it's one thing to say a prayer in your heart; it's another to respond to Him with action- it makes your prayer and response all the more real and serious. Maybe you need to talk with him about an area of life you need to obey him in. Maybe you need to humble yourself and get right with him. Or maybe, for the first time ever, you need to give your life over to Jesus.

**Excursus:

1. This happens in the Bible repeatedly at the beginning of new chapter in God's story where a new community of his followers is being established. In Lev 10, Josh 7, Acts 5 similar, sober, drastic events happen, instilling a sense of seriousness in the people.
2. Even Jesus, when He came as God in the flesh, communicated this to his would be followers, that He cannot be taken lightly. A number of hard sayings of Jesus are given in your bulletin: Matthew 11:20-24, John 6:66, Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26-31, Acts 5:1-11, 8:9-24. Matthew 12:32- beware of refusing Jesus and all that He is. (the context: attributing a miracle to demons, rejecting Jesus outright. If you deny God in Jesus, you are in trouble. Yes, you can blasphemy the Son of Man at the moment because He is still being revealed- you don't understand the nuances of who Jesus is as Son of Man. But you can't deny Him).