

Dance Lessons From David
2 Samuel 6
Englewood Baptist Church
Sunday morning, June 6, 2010

David is without a doubt, one of the most well known characters in all the Bible. We know him as the ruddy shepherd boy, as the fearless giant killer, as a wise king, and as a builder of a great nation. These are popular images of this Old Testament hero. What we don't imagine much, when picturing David, is the moment when he showed off his moves and danced before thousands of people. In 2 Samuel 6, David dances.

Did I just mention dancing in the Baptist church? I believe I did. Some would call this a rookie mistake on my part. Some would say, "Let a sleeping dog lie, young man! Don't stir up trouble." Baptists and dancing go together like peaches and ketchup. The two don't mix.

I realize the risk I'm taking in broaching this subject, by even titling my message, "Dance Lessons from David." I grasp the sensitivity of the subject. but the passage of Scripture that we study today is an enchanting moment in David's life...the day that this young leader took a huge risk and gave God an undignified style of worship. He is not dancing with a woman in this text. He is not dancing in a high school gymnasium at a prom. David is not dancing on a hit television show with stars. No, David is seen dancing in the streets, before the Lord, celebrating how much God loves Him.

The truth is...this passage is not about dancing. Anyone that tries to make a case for for their school dance from this text skews the purpose of the passage and misses the forest for the trees. 2 Samuel 6 was not given to us to teach us how to dance, so the guy in Footloose was wrong. The passage was given to teach us principles about joyful worship and our attitude toward God in giving him praise. There are several key lessons for us to learn as we plow through this story.

Let me read it to you. David is about to bring the ark of the covenant into the city of Jerusalem. And some things go wrong. Watch what happens...

Read 2 Samuel 6:1-23.

Now, that's a lot of verses to cover in the next 25 minutes, but let me break down this passage and help you catch some key lessons about worship that emerge from this unusual event in David's life

What Do We Learn About Worship?

1. Worship must be Word-centered.

What I mean by that is this: God has given us instructions on how to approach Him as we worship Him. In this passage, a man named Uzzah falls dead when he touches the ark of God. This all seems a little harsh, doesn't it? Couldn't God have just sent a lightning bolt 30 feet away or something? I mean, this guy was only trying to keep the ark from falling off the clumsy ox! V. 6 says that when they came to the threshing floor, that is, a large stony area on the ground, the oxen stumbled and the ark almost tipped over like a too tall wedding cake. Uzzah was trying to help; he puts his hand out to steady the sacred box and his life was instantly taken.

Now, before we go any further, let me give you...

Three Facts About the Ark of the Covenant

- **The ark was THE most important piece of furniture in the temple. As this figure shows,** it was a large box that contained the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments. The top of the box had two angelic beings facing one another and bowing. It was believed that this was the mercy seat, where God would literally sit down in the camp of Israel. That gold-laden box represented the very power of Israel.
- **The ark represented the presence of God.** So this was more than a rabbit's foot or 4-leaf clover or a mascot. The reason people respected the ark was because it represented Immanuel: God with us. Of course, today we recognize that this rectangular box was just a foreshadowing of a greater Immanuel, for a day would come when God would come in the flesh, and not on the lid of a box. When Jesus came to the Earth, it was said that HE dwelt among us. In the Old Testament, God dwelled among His people by filling the seat on the Ark.
- **The ark was designed for mobility.** It was not wrong for the people to move the ark. It was created with poles by which it could be hoisted and carried. Number one, it had to be carried by those poles. You couldn't touch it with your hands. Number two, only priests could be involved in the transport. The average joe was not permitted to put his fingers even on the poles of the box. God wanted it to move as His people moved from place to place, but He did not want it casually handled. It represented His power, and you don't play with the power of God. He is holy, holy, holy.

Now, having said that, let's go back to the text. I can now help you see why God was so displeased with David and his leadership at this moment. Look at v.3...it says that David had the ark placed on a cart. Well, that's how the pagan Philistines moved it! It was wrong. That's not the way that God had clearly written. It was to be carried by the poles, by the priests, not stuck on a cart. David made a hasty decision and it cost a man his life.

Second thing David did wrong. He used the wrong people. Look at this passage from 1 Chronicles 15. This is a parallel passage of this same event. David confesses his error. He says this to the Levites:

¹³ It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the LORD our God broke out in anger against us. We did not inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way.”

The Levites were supposed to carry the ark, and no one else. Evidently, David had paid no attention to what God had said in Scripture. In the end, he deeply regretted how he had ignored God’s Word.

Now, what in the world does all this ark hauling have to do with you and me in 2010? How does an Old Testament transportation fatality bear any significance on our lives? Here is the application.

God has told us how to live. These commands in Scripture...they aren’t here for our consideration. They are written for our obedience. So when I stand up and preach what the Bible says on...

- God’s plan for the family, God is not recommending to children that they should respect their parents. They are commanded to honor their parents, and when they disobey, there are consequences.
- God’s plan for salvation, people don’t have the option to repent. Acts 17:30 says that, “God now commands all people everywhere to repent.” When a person hears the gospel and rejects it, there are serious consequences for turning his back on God’s plan.
- God’s plan for giving, Christians don’t have the option of keeping all their money to themselves. The Bible says that all the tithe belongs to the Lord and we should be bringing our tithe to the Lord. When we cut corners and “withhold money” from God, there are consequences for rejecting his commands.

God has prescribed a way for us to live! This is why so many people avoid preachers and avoid the Bible altogether. They don’t want the prescription! To carry an ark on poles is so much more difficult than to throw it on a cart. But when we honor the Lord and follow His instructions, no matter how challenging they seem, we come out in the end, happier and with the fullness of peace.

The instructions are right here in the book. Just as a doctor prescribes pills to ease our pain, that is, he tells us what to do...God had prescribed a way for us to live in our everyday lives. Now the Word of God also has bearing on the way that we worship. The Bible has lots to say about what God desires in our worship services.

What Does God Desire in Worship?

- **He wants us to sing.**

Serve the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. (Ps. 100:2)

Folks, when we gather together, God wants you to open your mouth and make a sound. It doesn't say, "come before him with joyful songs in tune." You may never be a soloist but you are called to be in the great choir of God, so don't worry about what other people think. If you are worried about what other people think, you are seeking the eye of people and not the eye of God. Sing to the Lord! He loves the sound of your praising voice.

- **He wants us to pray.**

"Come near to God and he will come near to you." James 4:8

God wants us to speak to Him when we stand in His presence. You can't talk to somebody on the other side of the city. You talk to someone when you get together, face-to-face, and have conversation. When we come into worship, we have moments of prayer to draw near to God and to tell Him what we feel and what we desire. He wants us to ask Him for things, like a child who seeks the help of his father. We are here to express our neediness and our dependence.

- **He wants us to proclaim His Word.**

"How can they hear unless someone preaches to them?" Romans 10:14

The preaching event in worship is not a moment for some man to share his favorite stories or to endear the congregation to him. The preaching in worship is the time for God's Word to be opened and explained. Sometimes it makes us feel happy, sometimes it makes us feel sad and convicted, sometimes it makes us feel grateful, sometimes it makes us feel burdened. The Word of God bears fruit when it goes forth. It cuts us deep and it cuts us each differently and it never returns void.

When it comes to worship, God has told us some of the elements that He would like included. Now I could go on talk about other things that God has prescribed in worship. I could talk about the sacraments in the church, the Lord's Supper and Baptism. I could also speak about thanksgiving and confession and the reading of Scripture, but suffice it to say that God does not give us the freedom to do just anything in worship. We should follow HIS instructions just like David should have followed them.

Let me ask you: what path are you on today? Are you walking in the will of God? Are you concerned at all with the instructions God has provided for your life? Are you walking according to your own understanding, or are you walking according to His Word? Only you can answer that question, but understand. This isn't an optional exercise. Just like Uzzah learned when he touched the ark, you don't mess with the ways of God. You obey them. That's the only way to live.

Now, let's move on in the text. Let's see what happens after Uzzah dies. We have learned that worship must be Word-centered. We also learn that...

2. Worship must involve sacrifice.

Look with me at v.12, the second time David sought to move the ark. It says this...

So David does something different here that he didn't do the first time. He is more reverent. He makes a sacrifice six steps in, long before he starts jumping for joy. He is showing respect for the Lord. Now, let's be honest, David is shaking in his boots here. He knows the first attempt at ark relocation did not go well. In fact, vv. 8-9 say that David was angry at God and afraid of God.

We can all identify with that, right? Have there been moments when you have been frustrated with the plan of God? You're lying today if you say no. All of us have scratched our heads a time or two at the sovereign plan of God. David had a lot of anger that his friend Uzzah had died, and that God had taken his life. Not only was he angry, he was terrified of what God could do to him as well. V.10 says that David was so scared that he stayed away from the ark for 3 months. V.10, "He was not willing to take the ark of the Lord."

Now, let's understand what that means. The ark represented the very presence of God and David didn't want to be near it. Do you ever feel that way? Of course you have. There have been times in your life when you were so bitter or resentful for your circumstances that you turned your back on God. You knew HE was still there, waiting on you, but your heart felt cold and hardened and unspiritual.

Maybe you are like David today. Maybe you are angry and afraid of God. Maybe you question his plan. Maybe you question His goodness. Maybe you question His love and His mercy. I would say this: you can't run from God forever. You have to put your life in His hands, even when faith seems frightening.

After three months of sulking, David returned to the Lord, and this time, six steps into the parade, he says "Stop! Let's offer a sacrifice to the Lord. He's in control here." And the life of a bull and the life of a calf was given.

Do you know what kind of sacrifice God desires from you today? Before you take six steps out of this sanctuary today, do you know what he wants? He wants your heart. Jesus said in John 14,

**"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."
John 14:1**

The LORD wants you to trust him, no matter what this life brings. That's the sacrifice.

And when David offered his sacrifice, he was renewing his faith in the goodness and power of God. Whatever it would take, David wanted to please the Lord.

Are you ready to say that to God? “Lord, whatever it takes, I am ready to please you.” Tell me what you want, and I will make the sacrifice. I’m not going to take six more steps outside of your will.

D.L. Moody used to say, “Catch on fire for Jesus and the world will come and watch you burn.” Could that be said of your life? Have you given Him the sacrifice He desires.

3. Worship must involve humility and praise.

And now we get to the dance portion of the service here. Look at v.14...

Now, notice the outfit that David sports. A linen robe was not the uniform of a king. He had taken off his “high and mighty” suit, and put on the common clothes of a priest. The linen ephod was standard issue for the ordinary temple servant. This was a huge statement that David was making in his dress.

What he was saying was simple, “When it comes to worshipping the Lord, we are all equal.” Now, this is a shocking statement for a king. He was considered royalty. He was a cut above the rest. He was aristocratic, a man who had hundreds of helpers and servants, a man who perched on a giant throne with a scepter and a crown. Yet, he puts all that away when he worships the Lord because he didn’t want that to get in the way. He knew that God doesn’t measure a man by his earthly achievements or position. *God measures a man by his humility.*

Now, let me tell you something. Humility won’t make you popular. Humility won’t put in the headlines or earn you an audience. Humility won’t impress the world. The world says, “Show people who you are. Make a name for yourself, and project an image of strength. Don’t let people see your weakness or your frailty.”

David rejected that advice. When it came to worship, David knew where he stood. He was an ordinary servant of God. And in v.20, David’s wife puts herself in the camp of Job’s crazy wife. She brings a Satanic assault, “How dare you become so undistinguished, so ordinary, so unremarkable, so unexceptional!” And look what David says in v. 21... *“it was before the Lord...I will celebrate before the Lord...I will become even more undignified than this...I will be humiliated in my own eyes.*

And this is why God loved David so much. David did not self-depricate. He was not ignoring his heavenly gifts. He knew he was talented, he knew his leadership scores were off the chart, he knew that he was winsome in the eyes of man. This was not false humility, this was true humility. David knew that he would be still be feeding smelly sheep if God hadn’t made him a king. So...he didn’t care what he looked like; he was going to celebrate the extravagant grace of God.

Do you celebrate the grace of God? Are you embarrassed to worship the Lord? Are you afraid what your coworkers might think if you sing out with enthusiasm, if you show emotion for Christ, if you bow down at an altar in prayer? Are you concerned with your reputation today, or are you concerned about your relationship with God. Humiliate yourself and you will be exalted.

Number two, God wants humility in worship but also praise. David not only brought humility in his worship, he brought the highest expression of joy. Now I'm not suggesting that we all need to dance in the aisles at the song of invitation today, but what this text clearly calls for is a display of emotion. Worship ought to make us emotional. When we sing to the Lord, and we hear his Word, our heart ought to be moved, they ought to BURN WITHIN us like the disciples who walked the road to Emmaus.

What we cannot do is come before the Lord week after week with cold, crusty, apathetic spirits. No, let the Lord into that inner place and when he floods your heart with joy, don't be afraid to show emotion. When he breaks down your pride, don't be afraid to break down in tears. Let God have his way and don't worry about what other people think. Your business in this room with God is more important than your business outside with men. And David looked straight into the eyes of his wife, and he said respectfully, "I don't really care what those servant girls think. I will worship the Lord, even if it means people call me silly." He was not putting on a show before men. He was sincerely caught up in the moment of praise. Oh, God, have pity on us, your church, if we fail to get caught up in your love and grace. Forgive us when our worship is a pitiful expression of our thanks.

Fill up our hearts with joy, and let us give you the highest expressions of praise. That's what you want, isn't it?