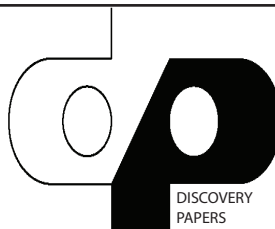


ARMS WIDE OPEN

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



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Samuel 6:1-23
24th Message
Paul Taylor
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2 Samuel 6:1-23

Here we are, gathered at Peninsula Bible Church, on a beautiful Sunday morning. We're here to worship God. The creator of the universe. The author of life. The Father. Jesus Christ, the Son. And the Holy Spirit.

The strange thing, though, is that it's very possible to be here in this room with any number of different attitudes toward God. You can be angry toward God. You can be disappointed. You can be afraid of him. You can be completely indifferent. You can not even think he exists.

A few years ago in the movie *Bruce Almighty*, Jim Carrey plays a character who is frustrated with how his life is going. Everything seems to be going wrong. Watch this clip to see his attitude toward God.

This clip is a bit over-the-top. Most of us don't go on tirades against God. But do we have some of these thoughts? Do we wonder sometimes whether God is on our side or against us? When we're honest with ourselves, how do we respond to God?

This morning we're continuing our series in the life of David that we've called *A Life of Passion*. Last August we started walking our way through the longest biographical narrative of the Bible, and we're about halfway into the life of David. We've seen David as a shepherd and a fugitive, but now finally we have arrived at the time in his life that David is most known for. It's taken David a long time to get here, but he is king over all Israel. The glory days of Israel are upon us.

As we read 2 Samuel 6 today, we will see one of the highest moments of David's life. We've seen David win. We've seen him lose. We've seen him celebrate and we've seen him grieve. But this morning we have a very unique privilege. This morning we get to see David dance.

One of David's most famous titles is that of "a man after God's own heart." At various points throughout David's story, we've asked what this really means. Why is David described as a man after God's own heart? What makes David so remarkable?

I think, in part, it's his dancing. Or at least the heart behind his dancing. In our passage this morning, we're going to see David responding directly to God in a powerful way. It's him and God. Today we see David completely opening himself to God. David stands before God with arms wide open.

I happen to be preaching this sermon on my birthday: my fortieth. I wanted to preach this passage. And I wanted to preach it today of all days. Because at a personal turning point, it's forced me to ask: how do I respond to God? There are so many aspects to following Jesus, but it all starts with our posture toward God. How do you respond to God?

In addition to David's dancing, we're going to see three other examples of responding to God. We'll see a young man who thinks he can figure out how to manage God on his own. We'll see a young woman who is locked into her past and worried about her image. And we'll see David, before he dances, afraid and hiding.

As we encounter these pictures, we'll compare ourselves to these people. Who are we most like? Are we competent on our own? Are we proud and bound to our image? Are we afraid and confused? Or are we willing to let ourselves fall on the mercy and grace of a God who cannot be controlled or managed? Are we willing to open our arms? Are we willing to dance?

The arrogance of Uzzah

A big theme in our story this morning is the ark of God. The ark was a wooden box that God commanded Moses to make as part of the tabernacle, or the house of worship, when God's people wandered in the desert for forty years. The ark was about four feet long and two and one half feet wide and high. On the top of the ark were two angels with outstretched wings. Gold plating covered the ark. It was a magnificent, beautiful object.

But it wasn't just beauty: the ark had incredible meaning. It represented the presence of God. And what you need to know for our story today is that throughout Israel's history, the presence of God has always brought about the blessing of God. Good things happen where God is present and worshipped. The presence of God brings the blessing of God.

Our story begins at a time when the ark had been almost forgotten. After being stolen and returned by the Philistines several decades earlier, it languished at the house of Abinadab. He lived about eight miles west and slightly north of Jerusalem in a village called Kiriath-Jearim or Baale-Judah in our story.

David had just become king over all of Israel and established Jerusalem as his new headquarters. His first job was to unify his people. He knew that the one thing that was meant to bring God's people together was his presence. So David wanted to bring the ark into Jerusalem. He wanted the people of God to unify around the presence of God so they could experience the blessing of God. It was a good plan.

2 Samuel 6:1-7.

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 2 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. 3 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, 4 with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark.

5 And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. 6 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. 7 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.

Things didn't turn out as well as David had hoped. His celebration turned into a tragedy.

He should have known better. God was clear about how the ark was supposed to be carried. When God gave Moses the instructions for the ark, he spelled it out in **Exodus 25:13-14:**

You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 14 And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them.

Joshua 4 describes the priests following these instructions precisely when the ark was first carried into the Promised Land.

So where did Uzzah get the idea to put the ark on a new cart? It came from the Philistines. When they sent the ark back to Israel after stealing it, they sent it on a new cart. This is how the Philistines treated their gods. So it's how they treated the God of Israel. Uzzah wasn't being careless, he was just being careful in the wrong way. He was treating the God of Israel the way the culture around him treated their gods.

The consequence is shocking. Why would God strike Uzzah dead for this? All he did was touch the ark. What's going on?

This story is similar to the New Testament story of Ananias and Sapphira who were struck dead for lying to God and his people. This isn't a standard response of God. This is the exception rather than the rule. But there seem to be times when God makes a point incredibly clear at a critical moment in history.

Uzzah's death made it very clear that worshipping God is serious business. You don't just do what makes the most sense. You don't just import ideas from the culture and apply them to God. You can't manage God and expect him to be happy with.

Are we at all like Uzzah? Do we treat God like someone to be managed? Do we import the tactics of our culture to keep God happy instead of listening to how God says he wants to be treated? Do you do this? Do you try to manage God?

Worshipping the God of the Bible is different from worshipping the gods of our culture. Our culture worships celebrities. We worship money. We worship sports and music and brands. We have ways of doing these things. We need to be careful that our worship of the God of the Bible doesn't just look like worshiping the gods of our culture.

When I was in seminary in Dallas, I toured a mega-church that was converting an old movie theater into a huge facility. They had a modern worship center, a youth center with flat screens everywhere and surf boards hanging from the wall, and a top-notch children's area.

But as I walked through the building, I kept thinking about the people who would worship there. Had they sat in the same place years earlier to be entertained by Hollywood? Now they would sit there to worship God watching a screen with a preacher instead of a movie star. Would that be confusing? Would they feel like they were worshipping in the same way, but had swapped the god of entertainment for the god of Christianity?

The gods of our culture are impersonal, demanding, entertaining, self-absorbed, and oriented around success. Do we just assume that's what our God is like? Our God doesn't want us to treat him like a famous movie star who might give us an autograph if we ask nicely.

Our God asks his people to carry him on their shoulders. He is personal and intimate. We don't manage God. We relate to God. We aren't entertained on a Sunday morning. We are on our knees before Him. What does God want from us? He wants our heart. He wants us, not our best efforts to keep him happy.

David is scared

David realized this. He got the message. Worship is serious business. In fact, he understood the message so clearly that it scared him. He didn't know what to do with it. He didn't know what to do with God. Read his reaction.

2 Samuel 6:8-11.

And David was angry because the Lord had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. 9 And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" 10 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. 11 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.

God was angry with Uzzah for thinking he could manage God the way that the cultures managed their gods. David was angry with God for getting angry at Uzzah. God's anger made David angry.

Do you recognize this pattern? Sometimes, my wife will be upset with me. It's usually the case that she has good reason to be upset. But instead of trying to understand her anger and listen to it and respond to it, I just get mad right back. I'm mad that she is mad. One person's anger can often ignite anger in response.

This is what happens for David. He is angry that God is angry. He's not worried about God's anger. He doesn't try to understand where it's coming from. He's just scared and upset. So he pushes God away. He retreats. He parks the ark with some guy named Obed-edom, who probably wasn't even an Israelite, just to get it out of his way. He doesn't deal with God's emotion. He runs from it.

I'm sympathetic to David. It's confusing when God is angry. It's even more confusing to be angry with God. What do you do when you're mad at God? He's in charge. As Bruce in our movie clip so clearly put it, he could smite us.¹ It's his game.

But we actually have some legitimate reasons to be upset with God. The world doesn't look like it ought to. Our lives don't work the way we want them. There is pain and suffering and injustice everywhere we look.

The question is not whether we are upset with God. The question is: how do we handle it? David was angry with God and he pushed God away. Sadly, this is often our response as well. We don't know what to do with our anger. We're scared by it. We hide it or ignore it or deny it. So we push God away. How do you push God away?

Mark Buchanan, a Canadian pastor and author, said this regarding David's anger and our own anger:

"If you don't have the capacity to be angry at God, then you are not going to go very far in your spiritual life. If you haven't been profoundly disappointed with the way God has acted, then you are not dealing with God."²

What are you disappointed with God about? Notice that I didn't ask whether you were disappointed. We all have some grievance against God. The question is whether we realize it and what we do with it. We don't have to push God away. We can deal with him.

Read the Psalms. Bring your complaint to God in prayer. Journal about your disappointment. Bring your anger to God.

David sees the mistake that Uzzah made and he's scared by it so he gets safe and conservative. He pushes God away. And what happens? Remember how we said that the ark brought the presence of God and the presence of God brought the blessing of God? This happens for Obed-Edom. He is blessed. And David misses out. Because he was afraid of the hard part of dealing with God, he misses out on the good stuff.

David is open to God

When David realizes he is missing out on the good things from God, he changes his mind. He remembers why he wanted to bring the ark to Jerusalem in the first place. David wanted God's people to experience God's blessing.

So David gets over his anger. He figures out what went wrong the first time. And he tries again. But this time, he's not cautious and scared. He doesn't try to manage God. Listen to how David opens himself up to God in 2 Samuel 6:12-19. This is David at his best.

2 Samuel 6:12-19:

And it was told King David, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. 13 And when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. 14 And David danced before the Lord with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod. 15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

16 As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart. 17 And they brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. 18 And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts 19 and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed, each to his house.

I'm amazed at David's courage here. Remember what had just happened. Someone was killed for handling the ark improperly. But David jumps back in. He stops being careful and he abandons himself to the mercy of God. This is the picture of David that we want to keep before us: "David danced before the Lord with all his might."

It would be an understatement to say that this is an odd thing for a king in the Ancient Near East to do. Virtually every occurrence of dancing in the Old Testament is associated with either young women or children. You never hear about men dancing. Fathers didn't dance. Kings certainly didn't dance.

If you grew up in America and went to public school, then you know about dancing. As a kid, you have to figure out what to do at a school dance. You either dance really well and score a lot of social points; or you hang out in the corner; or you try to dance and feel self-conscious the

whole time. People all over the world in every culture, in every time, have danced. It's a powerful but vulnerable way of expressing emotion.

And here you have David dancing with all his might. He is abandoned to God. Instead of running from the presence of God in fear, he opens his arms and says, "Here I am, God. I am yours. I want to be in your presence even if I don't really know what that means. Even if it is dangerous and risky and could lead to me getting hurt or disappointed, I want to be open to you."

Are we like that? Can we abandon ourselves to the presence of God? Can you open your arms to God?

I think that's hard for us. We're a careful bunch. Many of us are educated and successful and professional. We've learned not to let ourselves go like this. We went to school with Uzzah and learned how to manage everything around us so that things didn't get out of hand.

Worshipping God this way means being honest about who you are. It means embracing your fears and your weaknesses and your joys and your victories. It means including God in every part of your life. Let's be clear: this is not about how you sing songs on a Sunday morning. This is about how you live your life during the week.

This isn't some impossible spiritual experience for the incredibly mature, either. It's not complicated. It's just a regular awareness of God's presence. You don't have to actually dance. Just let your guard down and let God in. Some of you live this way. Some of you have tasted it. Some of you can't even imagine.

Look at what happens when David lives like this. He experiences the presence of God. The people experience the presence of God. And what follows is the blessing of God. It's a unique kind of celebration. Kings didn't normally do this. But the text says that David "blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts and distributed among all the people."

The word for "distributed" usually refers to something being split up among people: an inheritance or a parcel of land. It's division. But here, distributed means something different. It's not one thing cut up into smaller pieces. It's the blessing of God, distributed to the people of God. And the crazy thing is that it seems to grow as it gets distributed. The blessing is multiplied, not divided.

A few weeks ago, the Powerball lottery was making huge headlines because the prize was up to over \$1.3 billion dollars: the largest prize ever. While this was happening, there was a meme going around Facebook that said \$1.3 billion divided by 300 million people living in the

US would come out to \$4.3 million dollars per person. That sounds incredible, right? Poverty would be solved.

Except that the math is wrong. My favorite response was a meme that said \$1.4 billion divided by 318 million people comes out to \$4.39. That's enough to buy everyone in America a calculator.

But in God's economy, there is plenty of blessing for everyone. God's blessing is multiplied when it is shared; it is not divided. It's like Jesus handing out five loaves and two fish to thousands of people. Our economy is based on scarcity. Dividing things up to make sure there is enough to go around. But the blessing of God never runs out.

So David distributes the blessing to the people. He gives them bread, meat, and raisin cakes. Bread was the essential. You needed bread to live. Meat was a luxury. Eating meat was special. Raisin cakes were thought of as an aphrodisiac. In the Old Testament they were most often associated with the fertility rites of the pagan gods.

This is the life that everyone is after. The livelihood of bread; the luxury of meat; the legacy of raisin cakes. Needs are met. Life is celebrated. And people are fruitful. David sends his people home to enjoy that blessing. They will eat and drink and do what comes naturally after you eat some raisin cakes. Everyone in Israel was going home to have a party and make some babies.

Michal is jealous and proud

Everyone except David. Because all is not well in David's house. We had a hint of it in this passage when we read of Michal looking out her window and despising David in her heart. As the story concludes, we'll see her response to the presence of God.

2 Samuel 6:20-23:

And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "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!" 21 And David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord—and I will celebrate before the Lord. 22 I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." 23 And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

David is excited to get home. He's bringing his raisin cakes with him and he's hoping for a certain kind of evening with Michal. As readers we know about her looking at the window at him and despising him, but he has no idea.

He finds out quickly. Instead of a romantic welcome he is ambushed by her anger. He isn't even in the door when she comes out to meet him. Her first words are laced with sarcasm and insult. What results is a huge fight. In fact, this was their last fight because this interaction functionally ended their marriage.

Michal is jealous. She is embarrassed by her husband. She is angry that the house of her father, Saul, has been left behind in favor of the house of David. To be fair, she has a lot of good reasons to be upset. Throughout David's story, she has not been treated well. David is terrible to her in this fight. Prior to this he has mostly treated her as a political pawn. It's difficult to be too hard on Michal because she has suffered so much.

But the narrative is critical of her. While all of Israel is celebrating, eating their raisin cakes, and hoping to get pregnant, Michal is yelling at her husband. And this is the last we hear of her. She doesn't die like Uzzah, but as far as her story is concerned, she might as well be dead. Not only is she not getting pregnant tonight, she never will. Her story ends with the ominous finale: "Michal had no child to the day of her death."

Michal is cut off from the blessing of God because of jealousy and pride. Her suffering consumed her. She couldn't see past it. She was focused on all that she had lost. She was worried for her public image. All of this meant that she was unable to enjoy the presence of God. So she was cut off from the blessing of God.

Do you find yourself doing this? Are you jealous and proud? Do you resent the blessing of God in the lives of others? Do you despise the blessing of God because of your own hurt? Do you hold yourself back from the people of God enjoying the blessing of God? Do you isolate yourself from God?

I can feel like this. When I look around at what God has given me, I am so thankful. I love my job. I love my family. I love the people that God has put in my life. I couldn't ask for more. And I'm supremely content in what God has given me. Until I look at what he's given someone else.

Then the seeds of jealousy start to sprout. I'm happy with my life until I think about what someone else is enjoying. I thought I appreciated the path God had laid out for me until I compared it with the path of another. I can enjoy God's blessing until I start to wonder what I'm missing out on.

And when I do that—when I live in that place instead of the place of God’s presence—I cut myself off from the blessing of God. There is no joy because I’m focused on what I don’t have. There is no intimacy because other people are competitors rather than friends. And there is no fruitfulness because I see the world as win or lose, not plant and grow.

When we live like this, we don’t die like Uzzah died. But life gets narrow. Comparison dominates. We can’t experience the joy of intimacy or the fulfillment of fruitfulness. We have cut ourselves off from God’s presence and we miss out on God’s blessing.

Conclusion

We’ve seen four different versions of responding to God this morning. Uzzah was arrogant and tried to manage God. David was scared and pushed God away. Michal was jealous and too proud. Each one of these individuals fails to experience the presence of God and misses out on the blessing of God.

But in the middle of those three individuals, we see a king who faces into his fear and shows us a glorious picture of authentic worship. What was it that changed everything for David? Why did he go from being angry and scared to courageous and free?

David saw the blessing of God and he wanted it. He wanted the blessing that Obed-Edom received. He wanted it for himself and for his people. Do you want the blessing of God?

Maybe you’re careful like Uzzah. Maybe you’re scared like David. Maybe you’re proud like Michal. Maybe you’re like me and you’re all those things at once. It doesn’t matter where you find yourself. It doesn’t matter what mistakes you’ve made. The answer is the same. Open your arms before God. Dance if you dare.

When I think about David doing that, I remember another king. Another king who was stripped bare and exposed before his servants. Another king who stood with his arms wide open before God, even if it was dangerous and costly. Another king who was humiliated and mocked by those who should have received and embraced him.

Jesus Christ, the son of David, hung on the cross. He opened himself up to the presence of God and the plan of God and he died because of it. But where Uzzah’s death meant he missed out on the blessing of God, the death of Christ had the opposite effect. The death of Jesus released the blessing of God on the entire world. The Spirit would multiply throughout the world and offer the news of the Gospel of God’s presence and blessing to any who would hear.

A few days ago I was on Stanford campus for the first time in a few years. I took some time to sit in the beautiful Memorial Church and reflect on the place that brought me to Bay Area over twenty years ago. I sat there in the pew and looked at a stained glass window of Jesus with his arms spread wide on the cross and thought of this passage.

As I enter a new season in my life, I felt so strongly that this is the life I want to live. I don’t want to be careful or restrained or afraid or jealous. I want to stand before God with open arms. This is the blessing I want: my needs to be met, life to be full, and to leave something behind.

Can you open your arms to the one who opened his arms for you? It’s risky. It’s dangerous. It might hurt. But it will bring the blessing of God to you and to the people in your life. It’s the only way to live. It’s the only way to truly and fully live. Stand before God with arms wide open.

Endnotes

¹ *Bruce Almighty*. Universal Pictures, 2003. Film.

² Buchanan, Mark. “With Skillful Hands and Integrity of Heart: Leadership Lessons from David.” Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. 2-6 June 2014.