

**Sermon: David and Worship**  
**God's Word: 1 Samuel 4:1-22**  
**Text: 1 Samuel 6:1-21**  
**Date: Sunday, May 6, 2018**  
**Preacher: Rev. Becky Stephens Smithey**

Some definitions I found this week concerning elements in worship.

- BULLETIN: Church information, read only during the sermon.
- PEW: A medieval torture device still found in most churches.
- HYMN: A song of praise, usually sung in a key three octaves higher than that of the congregation's range.
- CHOIR: A group of people whose singing allows the rest of the congregation to lip-sync.
- AMEN: The only part of a prayer that everyone knows.

This morning we are continuing our look at the song, "These Are the Days of Elijah," to see what we can learn about revival from it. Here's a quick reminder of what we've looked at before. We saw how Elijah declared the word of the Lord not only when it was hard to hear but also when it was hard to preach. No matter what else we do we need to be faithful to the Bible. Then, we saw how John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord, by urging the people to repent and how we can also prepare the way for God in our lives through repentance. Then, we looked at the year of jubilee. The year of Jubilee is all about forgiveness and restoration. We saw how God wanted to forgive and restore us and how it was our response to forgive and restore others. Last week we looked at Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones and how God can make our dead lives come alive again. God can make our skeletons dance.

And so, today, we are focusing our attention on the lines, "And these are the days of Your servant David, Rebuilding the temple of praise."

### Problem

Now the Biblical scholars among you or at least the ones who were paying attention during Sunday School, will see at least one small problem with this. David didn't build the temple let alone rebuild it. His son, Solomon, did. So our response when we get to this part may be to say it's nonsense and there's nothing to be learned here. I suppose you could say that, but that would be a very short sermon! Instead, we are going to look at an incident in David's life where he got about as close as possible to rebuilding the temple of praise. As we do this we are going to look at what is acceptable worship/praise to God.

The incident which we read about had to do with the return of the Ark of the Covenant from the Philistines and its installment to Jerusalem. But there was a hiccup, which we have read. Now, I'm fairly sure that nearly everybody has heard of the Ark of the Covenant, even those people who have never read the Bible have seen the movie, "Raiders of the Lost Ark." So I'm guessing most people know what the ark looks like. It was actually a wooden box. But it was covered with gold and instead of a wooden lid it had a solid gold lid with two golden angels on top. God commanded Moses to build it and put various things inside. It symbolized the presence of God and God sometimes used the ark when he did the miraculous. The most famous example is probably when Joshua came to the River Jordan at flood time and told the priests carrying the

Ark to walk into the middle of the river and when they did so the water stopped and the people crossed. But what was the ark for, what was its purpose?

### Purpose of the Ark

God had forbidden idols, but people need symbols and a focal point. The Ark represented the presence of God. It was the place of the shikina glory, which was the visible pillar of cloud and fire that initially went with Israel in the wilderness and eventually came to rest on the temple when it was dedicated. It was the meeting place between God and man, where the high priest came once a year to the holy of holies. It was the place of redemption where once a year on the Day of Atonement, blood was poured over the lid, called the mercy seat to cleanse all of Israel from their sins. It was a symbol of God's holiness, presence and power. It kind of stood for God. But the fact that it was a box not an idol reminded people it was not God. It contained relics from the past, not because they possessed power but that they were a reminder to the people. Firstly, there was Aaron's staff, which was used to part the Red Sea, provided water in the wilderness and kicked off a number of the plagues but it was a symbol of the saving power of God, then there was a pot of manna, the bread God provided in the wilderness to remind them of God's provision, that he would take care of them and finally there was the stone tablets on which the law was written to remind the people of God's requirements. Like a lot of the other stuff in the Old Testament, it was an object lesson. It was to be taught to the children, the meaning behind it all, so they could get what it pointed to. Part of that lesson was how it was to be carried and the fact that no-one could touch it, to demonstrate the unapproachable holiness of God. It was essentially, the primary object in Israelite worship.

### Why the Ark was Lost

Before we get into the story of David returning the Ark to Jerusalem, let's first look at why it wasn't there in the first place. This is the story we read from 1 Samuel 4. Why was the ark lost in the first place? It Israelites were involved in a war against the Philistines and it was going badly. So some bright spark remembered the ark the miracles that had surrounded it in the past and thought that if they brought the ark to the front lines then surely they would win. But it failed and the ark was captured. The ark was not a magical thing that the people could make to work for them. If Indiana Jones or the government officials from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* had actually read 1 Samuel they wouldn't have been worried about the Nazis getting a hold of the ark. The ark was not a guarantee of invincibility. It was following God in the past that had led to victory—not the ark.

In worship and church we do this all the time. We can look at the great open air services of John Wesley. They brought great responses from the people gathered there. I don't think we quite appreciate nowadays quite how big an impact John Wesley had on English life and the number of ordinary people who were changed and became spiritual people. But if we think that that means that the way to successful evangelism is open air services, we miss the lesson of what John Wesley did. First, it wasn't just the services, but the prayer and holiness and lifestyle of John Wesley. It wasn't that the services were open air that was important it was the fact that he was taking the message to the people where they were and in a way that the people listened to. He also did things that were condemned by the church at the time because it had never been done before. Most people don't realize that those great Charles Wesley hymns were originally sung to

popular pub songs of the time and were condemned as too worldly by the Anglican Church. They were sung to the popular music of the time.

So what's my point? Those old cherished traditions that we like to cling to, were once new and modern and rejected by a lot within the church. The way to revival is not replicate or cling to the outward trappings of success in the past, the methods or the music. It is to have that same burning, all-consuming desire for God that motivated everything. To have that same desire for prayer, that same commitment to holiness and godliness, that same emphasis on repentance and the truth of the Bible. To emphasize the presence of God not merely the symbols of the presence of God.

### David and the Ark

Back to David. He thinks the time of the exile is over and he wants to bring it to Jerusalem where it can once again take that primary role in Israelite worship. So he puts it on a cart and sets out in a great celebration to escort the ark to Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the cart hits a pot hole and the ark looks like it might fall, so one of those guiding the cart, Uzzah reaches out a hand to steady the ark and God strikes him dead.

This is one of those stories which typically produces the response, that's not fair. Wasn't God being a bit harsh? After all, the motive of Uzzah could only have been good. He wanted to protect the ark, to stop it from falling. Surely he was doing the right thing. Unfortunately, he was disobeying God, as was David for transporting the ark on a cart in the first place. God had given strict instructions about how the ark was to be carried. It was to be carried on poles by a certain branch of priests. And nobody was to touch it. This was part of the object lesson that God had laid down. The ark represented God's presence and holiness. No-one was to touch it because no-one was holy enough to come into the presence of God without being destroyed. The high priest, once a year, was to sprinkle blood on it to atone for the peoples' sin and this was the way they could come to God without his holiness destroying them—through repentance and blood. God has laid this down clearly, yet it had been ignored? Was it harsh? In the Mosaic Law there were clear warnings about the Ark, but they went foolishly unheeded.

God does give us instructions about how we approach him and we ignore them at our peril. But I hear you say, or at least think... That was the Old Testament, that doesn't apply now. Well maybe, but the story of Ananias and Saphira comes from the book of Acts where a man and his wife are struck dead for lying to God and the church. Or what about Paul's warnings and teachings about communion? It's usually the bit we don't read at communion services but Paul says that because of the disgraceful way the church is having communion, people have fallen sick and died.

There is a proper way to approach God in worship but it has nothing to do with the instruments used, the songs sung, the location, the clothes we wear, the orientation of chairs or how like a church everything looks. It is a matter of attitude and respect. It is a matter of being aware of who God is and approaching him in the right way. It is one of those great tensions in the church, the awesomeness and reverence for God that we have and yet the free access and the fact we can call on God, Daddy. I remember a conversation/argument that took place in one of the Youth Groups that I directed. The older more traditional folks of the church argued that if you were

going to see the President of the United States you would dress up, so why do you do less for the King of Kings—the Ruler of our lives? (As I, the youth leader, was wearing jeans.) The rebuttal came when one of the Youth said, but if I were the daughter of the President of the United States and he was my Daddy, then I would come to him without getting all scrubbed up.

What is proper reverence for God? How do we approach God in the right way? Different cultures have different ways of showing respect and how somebody aged 60 shows respect is different to how someone at 15 shows respect. The one might think the other is funny or not showing proper respect but showing respect is a function of culture not one of universal application. For Jews, it shows respect when men cover their heads, but for older generations in our culture, having your head covered with a hat in church is disrespectful. It differs and we shouldn't expect everybody to show respect in the same way we do. But most important of all is how we approach God. We approach God through Jesus in acknowledgement that we only can approach God because He has forgiven us. I think that is the only way to maintain that intimacy and the reverence. We can be intimate, we can come as we are, but only because of what Jesus has done for us and only if we come with a repentant humble attitude.

The whole thing could be summed up in the words of Samuel to David's forerunner Saul. God desires obedience rather than sacrifice. David and Uzzah could claim they were trying to honor God by bringing the ark to Jerusalem and setting it at the heart of Israelite worship again, but God says that's all very well, but I want you to obey me, rather than do things you think will please me. That is the key to worship. It is not a matter of the words or songs we use, whether we are formal or informal, old fashioned or modern, somber or celebratory, what we must do is be obedient. God will not accept our worship if we come in sin and refuse to repent or if we come confident in our own worth. If we come in repentance and wanting God to transform our lives and trusting in Jesus; if we are obedient to God, then he will accept us and our worship.

A story was once told to me about a mother who let her son play with the paper bags she'd saved from the grocery store if he would put them away after he was done playing. One day she walked into the kitchen to find them all over the floor. The son was out at the piano with his Dad singing hymns of praise. When confronted, he protested, "But Mom, I want to sing to God." His father stated, "It's no good singing God's praise if you're disobedient."

### Conclusion

Worship is to feel in your heart, and express in some appropriate manner, a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overpowering love in the presence of that most ancient Mystery, that Majesty which we call our Father, which art in Heaven.

John Wesley printed a hymnbook. At the beginning of the book he included these "Directions for Singing":

1. Learn these tunes before you learn any others; afterwards learn as many as you please.
2. Sing them exactly as they are printed here without altering or mending them at all.
3. Sing all. See that you join with a congregation as frequently as you can, let not a slight degree or weariness hinder you.
4. Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength.

5. Sing modestly. Do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation so that you may not destroy the harmony.
6. Sing in time. Whatever tune is sung be sure to keep with it, do not run before or stay behind it; but attend close to the leading voices, and move there exactly as you can; and take care not to sing too slow.
7. Above all, sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing.

Now, I'm not sure how many of these really apply or are important. While it would be nice if we all sang in tune, for some of us, it's just not possible. But that last one is important. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself or any other creature.

We have learned that it is not the outward forms that are important and we must resist the temptation to copy the successful forms of the past without also following the spirituality of the past. We see that true worship is only possible through Christ and what he has done for us and if we remember this, and come to God remembering that we only come through Christ then our worship will be acceptable to God, no matter how out of tune we are.