

Title: The Dangers of Worship
Text: 2 Samuel 6
Theme: same as title
Occasion: Bluewater Association Meeting – CBC, October 10. 2010 PM
Prop Stmt: Worship must be Word-driven or it will be man-driven.

In 1982, Ron Allen and Gordon Borror co-authored a book called Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel. Their premise was clear. Worship is almost completely gone from the evangelical church and that must change. The church gathering was largely for evangelistic and motivational purposes. Thirty years ago, there was not much emphasis on praying in a service. The music was more horizontal than vertical. We sang about God to each other. We sang a lot about ourselves and we sang about how much we liked the gospel and its effect on us. But we did not come to engage with God as much as we gathered to engage with each other. In 1983, John MacArthur wrote a book on Worship called, “The Ultimate Priority” in which he demonstrated from John 4, that God’s purpose in sending Christ, and our purpose in evangelizing is to see more people worshiping God. Warren Wiersbe followed up a few years later, and not too long after that, John Piper’s bombshell of a statement hit. Missions exists because worship doesn’t! From the Scriptures he demonstrated how missions must be God-centered and that we go to all the nations in order that God’s fame may be spread in the glad worship of people who have been redeemed, which can only come through the gospel.

For the last 20 years, worship has become popular. I use that word “popular” intentionally, because while for some, worship has become popular, for others worship is confused with being trendy. Today, rare is the church that hasn’t to some degree gone through its own version of the “Worship Wars.” I guess if you are going to fight, you might as well fight about something that matters. But, what I have witnessed is that so much of the fighting is due to ignorance, self-righteousness and pettiness and has very little to do with actual worship.

At the risk of a terrible generalization, my observation has been that much of the fighting has been between those who can’t stand traditions and those who can’t stand change. The danger of that war is that everyone loses because traditions can be elevated above the Scriptures and changes can be driven by age preference, polls, and trends instead of the Bible. If we are going to get worship right – and we have to, then we have to pay careful attention to the Scriptures.

Our text for this evening is 2 Samuel 6.

David is the relatively new king over all of Israel. You may recall that following the death of Saul, David was made king over just the tribe of Judah and he established his capitol in Hebron, where he ruled for seven and a half years, while Ish-bosheth, son of Saul was made king over the rest of Israel and he reigned during that time in Mahanaim. The nation was divided and was literally involved in a civil war. Ish-bosheth was not a strong leader, David was. All that Ish-bosheth had going for him was Abner, who was his military commander. Abner realized that the kingdom needed to be united under David,

and he attempted to make it happen. Suspicions on both sides were very high. David trusted Abner, but David's commander, Joab, did not. Joab murdered Abner, and not long after that a couple of guys murdered Ish-bosheth. Israel had no military leader and no king, and the movement toward unification had already started, still, this was not the way to do it. Unification needs to be at the heart level. So, even though the elders from Israel do finally accept David's rule over the entire country, David needs to demonstrate that this really is a merger and not a hostile takeover. The first thing he does is he moves his capitol from Hebron in Judah to a more central location. He leads the now combined army to capture the Jebusite stronghold and he renames it Jerusalem. This becomes the new capital of the country, which was a great move by David because before this time it did not belong to the tribe of Judah or to the northern tribes. Then, the Philistines make a move against him and he leads the armies of Israel to respond and in two successive battles, he defeats them decisively.

You may also recall that at the end of Saul's reign, he dies on the battlefield in a terrible loss to the Philistines. To make matters worse, the army of Israel had brought the Ark of the Covenant from out the tabernacle, to the battlefield, in direct violation of the Mosaic law, in hopes that it would be like a rabbit's foot of sorts, a good luck charm and help them win. Not only did they lose the battle and their king and their king's son, Jonathan, they even lost the Ark of the Covenant. But, on this day, the scene is completely reversed. On this day, it was the Philistines who were routed and the text says (5.21) that the Philistines in their haste to escape left their idols on the battle field. Can you imagine the joy in Israel? The nation is being reunited, the army removes the shame of defeat, and now, God's name is vindicated as the idols of the Philistines are gathered up by David's army to be destroyed.

It is now time to really bring the nation together. David makes plans to move the tabernacle to Jerusalem and as part of this re-establishing of the worship life of the nation and the sacrificial system, he orders and plans for the Ark of the Covenant to be returned to the tabernacle. Remember, without the Ark of the Covenant, there is no Day of Atonement. Without the Day of Atonement, there is no means by which the nation is able to have their sins atoned for. For years now, the Ark has been gone from its home and the people have not been living in obedience to God's law. Finally, this was going to be remedied. Finally the tabernacle system, the sacrifices, the role of the priests would all be restored and the nation would be united, this time, not because of military power or a competent king on the throne, but because of their authentic worship of God. After all, that is what God had intended all along.

So, the preparations were made. And the scene is impressive, it is very impressive. Here is truly a national holy-day (holiday). 30,000 soldiers are participating in this parade, along with, obviously, many others. The Ark is going to be returned to the Tabernacle, and who is out front? It is David! Think of that! Here is the King, the one who leads the armies in victory, is now leading the nation in worship! King, Commander and Worship Leader; no wonder Jesus did not mind being called the Son of David. And the preparations were elaborate. Music was readied along with all of the instruments. A new cart was constructed in order to transport the ark. Uzzah and Ahio (probably brothers,

perhaps sons of Eleazer the High Priest) were driving the cart. This had to be, for so many reasons, a truly glorious day for David.

2 Samuel 6.1-6

The oxen stumbled and you can't let the Ark fall – can you? Uzzah did what just about anyone would do, he reached out and took hold of the Ark to keep it from falling. Was that not a noble thing to do? Did he not want to protect this most sacred piece of furniture? If it would have fallen, would that not have been a terrible thing to let happen in the midst of all of this celebration? Seriously wouldn't you want to keep the Ark of the Covenant from falling onto the ground and being damaged or getting dirty?

Of course we would, but God did not see it that way. And the text says that “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)

And in an instant, the fun, the shouting, the music, the dancing, the laughter and all of the joy was silenced. The parade stopped! And there, lying on the ground next to the Ark was the body of Uzzah. What do you do? What do you think? David's first response was anger (v.8). I should point out that the same word for the LORD's anger “bursting out” against Uzzah is the same word used several times in chapter 5, for the LORD's anger and power bursting out against the Philistines. But, then, David's anger turned to fear. “How can the ark of the Lord come to me?”

Honestly, this is a difficult text for us, isn't it? Does this not offend us? How could God do this? This guy was only trying to do a good thing?! His heart was in the right place, wasn't it? What kind of a God is this anyway? As a political event, a momentum builder, a celebration of unity and a referendum on David's leadership, this was a disaster! What kind of a leader is this that this most glorious day is actually judged by God?

There is something here that we dare not miss. If you are going to worship God (and you must), you must worship him in the manner that He has dictated. Which is why...

1. Worship is dangerous when it is not Word-Driven.

That is, the Word of God rightfully understood determines what is and is not acceptable worship. Not only that, but if worship is Word-driven, that means that it is going to be Christ-focused because Christ is the hero of the Scriptures. If we do not carefully use the Scriptures to inform us, to reform us, to refine us and to direct our worship, then we will come up with our own views of what is acceptable and not acceptable forms and practices. And what we come up with is usually based on what we like, or what we think people will like. When that happens, then inadvertently, we make ourselves, that is our preferences and experiences, the focus of worship instead of Christ! And that is idolatry!

There is an example of that here in 2 Samuel 6. Let's use a cart to carry the Ark. However, God had already dictated that the Ark was to be constructed with four rings

attached on the sides so that a pole on each side could be set in place so that 4 priests could carry it. So, I grant you that they were trying to do a good thing, but they were attempting to do a good thing in the wrong way, and God will not tolerate that. And of course the other issue had to do with Uzzah. He wrongfully assumed that his hand was cleaner than the dirt and his failure to understand and take to heart all that God had revealed cost him his life that day.

The construction of the tabernacle was designed to allow God to live in the midst of his people, but yet separated from them because they were sinful. So, while the tabernacle was to be set up in the midst of them, it also had a series of curtains and other pieces of furniture that served as barriers that could only be passed by certain people under certain circumstances. The Ark of the Covenant resided within the Holy of Holies portion, which was only to be visited once a year, and that only by the High Priest who could only come on that day, with the blood of the sacrifice that had been given for himself and for the nation. No one was ever permitted to actually touch the Ark, because no human could approach God, he is absolutely holy. Uzzah thought that he needed to give God a hand. He thought that he was doing God a favor. But, God does not need a favor. And it is never acceptable to violate God's Word in order to help God out.

Now, honestly, what does that have to do with how we worship today? We don't have the tabernacle anymore. We know that the Temple replaced the Tabernacle and that at the death of Christ, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was ripped in two, revealing that we all have access to God. Beloved, it has everything to do with how we worship today.

Let me give you a couple of examples:

In the past 30 years, the music of the church has been influenced by a genre that has been called praise and worship. Some of the stuff that has been written has been shallow, self-centered, feeling-based, trendy and has not lasted. Some of the stuff that has been written has been theologically sound, musically attractive and very helpful for the church. But, some of the emphasis that has come along with it, has, while well-intentioned been wrong. I have heard guys explain that when God established the tabernacle, he set it up in the midst of the Israelite camp. (which he did) And that God determined the location of each tribe around the tabernacle. (which he did) And that the tribe that was closest to the entrance of the tabernacle was the tribe of Judah. (which it was). And since, Judah, literally means "praise", God set this up because praise is the means by which we enter into the presence of God. And when you think of Psalm 100 which says, "Come into his presence with singing...enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise", you think, well yea that makes sense. Now pay attention because this is very important that we understand this. When you look at the tabernacle system, that was fulfilled by Christ, you realize that praise is not the means by which we gain entrance into the presence of God, the innocent death of the lamb, the penal, substitutionary, atonement for our sin by the sinless Son of God, is the means and the only means by which we can gain access to God. Praise is our response to the sacrifice that Christ has made. My praise does not get me into God's presence, but Christ's death on my behalf does.

Now, that may sound like I am quibbling over minutiae, but God was concerned about the details of worship, even the detail of how the pieces of furniture were to be carried because they are reflected in the details of our belief. Our praise does not earn us a favorable standing before God, but the death of Christ does. When we think that the volume of, or the earnestness of, our efforts gains us a standing with God, we have made ourselves as the ones who earn the right, rather than our Savior, Jesus Christ who has done that for us. Those who advocate that praise is the means by which we can get into the presence of God, are often the same ones who view the value of a worship service by how excited we get. When we think that good worship is defined merely by our feelings, then it is so easy to worship worship, instead of worshipping God.

Let me give you another example.

In many of the debates about worship, as I mentioned earlier we often hear people stating their stylistic preferences. Worship has to be driven by the Word, not by your cultural preferences. But, if you are not immersed in what the Word says about Worship, then naturally you are going to say what you believe to be acceptable worship based on your opinions instead of what God has revealed. When your view of worship is not informed by the Scriptures, you will not even know what questions to ask about worship.

Worship has to be Word-driven, gospel-based, Christ-exalting and therefore demands that we read the Word (1 Timothy 4.13), Preach the Word (2 Timothy 4.2); Sing the Word, Teach the Word, Pray the Word (Col. 3.16). Primarily we need to ask ourselves, did we read the Word, did we preach the Word, did we sing the Word, did we pray the word, did we teach the word, did we respond to the Word, did we respond to God based on his mercies by presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God because this is Spiritual Worship! (Romans 12.1-2)

Worship must be Word-driven.

David, it seems went back to the Word, and there learned that not only was no one permitted to touch the Ark, but that the Ark was to be moved only in the manner that God had prescribed. So, three months later, David tried it again. This time it was carried by men and not by a cart. The text also goes on to say that in addition to the music, David had a sacrifice offered every six steps. That sure would have slowed things down – wouldn't it? Although the text says that in the first attempt that David and all the house of Israel were making merry before the LORD, this time the text singles out David and says that David "danced before the LORD with all his might." Later on it describes his dancing as even leaping! And what happened? David's wife Michal saw what he was doing and she despised him in her heart. She was embarrassed that he was not embarrassed to display with such enthusiasm and energy what God meant to him.

2. Worship is Dangerous when we presume to know the motives of others.

David was dancing, Michel was despising. Do you remember Hannah? Hannah was pouring out her soul to God at the tabernacle and Eli thought that she must be drunk. Do you remember the woman who brought the alabaster perfume and anointed Christ with it and washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair? Do you not see a pattern here? People who are overwhelmed with the mercy of God or who are completely abandoned to God are often misunderstood and accused of ulterior motives. Why is it, that when the preacher really gets wound up, that it's good preaching and when a musician becomes overwhelmed with the truth of the song that it's showing off?

Corporate worship is necessary, but it is also very important and demands humility, and a surrender to the Word. True worship cannot be manipulated for then we are not worshiping God, but worshiping emotions. But neither is true worship all that tame, for when we try to keep it sedate, then we are not worshiping the infinite God, but our finite sophistication. It is so easy to bring our own experiences and assumptions, history, and cultural preferences to the gathering. And when we do, then we can assume that it is good worship if we are comfortable with all of the style. In other words, if it makes much of me, then I will approve, whether you like it fast, or slow, or loud or soft, or traditional (whatever that is) or contemporary (whatever that is). It's not about me. It's about Christ.

Do you think David had any idea of the implications of his actions? He brought the throne of God into Jerusalem. Just outside the city wall was the place where Abraham had attempted to offer up Isaac to God before an innocent substitutionary sacrifice was made on his behalf. That place would eventually become the location of the temple. But on this day he brought the dwelling of God to the city of God, in the midst of the people of God. A thousand years later, a son would be born in the same village where he had been born and would come now to this same city, and would be offered on an altar called a cross just outside the city walls. This time, the holy of holies would be blown open because the once and for all sacrifice for sins was made in full by Jesus Christ. The dwelling of God, really is with man, but not just in Israel, but with his people. And now, every gathering of his people, called the church, is the focal point of God's presence and God's work on this earth building his kingdom, reaching people with the gospel so that they will become what God intended them to be – true worshippers. Right now, we don't do it perfectly, but we need to give it careful attention. Because one day, we will do it around the throne with the sainted millions and it will be Word-driven and whole-hearted, and all-consuming because that is the only appropriate response to the eternal God and King Jesus Christ, our Savior, who by his death and with his blood has purchased us to be consummate worshipers consumed with this glory and grace.