

Prayers

To God

Weekly theme: the glory of God

The Biblical word for 'glory' is a word that can mean 'weight', 'presence', or 'intensity', all of them intensely physical properties. What do you experience of the physical presence of God? Praise Him for His glory and all you experience of His blessings today.

For myself

Dear Jesus. You have given us supreme teaching, immeasurable love, unsurpassed counsel, and the boundless favour of the Father. Help us to receive the blessings of this grace and live as people who have received the very best through our faith in You and our fellowship in each other. Give us the confidence to proclaim the message of this amazing and generous love to all who need it, now and always. AMEN

For others

Pray for people of the Catholic church as they absorb the news about the Pope's retirement. Pray for those who have to decide how to handle a change over of power to a new Pope. Many Christians struggle with what the Catholic church stands for, and many Catholics struggle with what other Christians stand for. Let us rather be brothers and sisters in faith as we pray that Christ's name be lifted highest amongst those who believe, and as high as possible amongst the nations.

Meditation

We call upon You, generous and Living Lord,
Saviour and friend of all who turn to You.
Heal us from the sicknesses of our disturbed world
And all that floods our lives with evil and destruction;

for example, by

The language of swearing and abuse,
Pornographic images men and women,
The relentless greed of many professions,
Glamorised perversions of love on TV,
Inequalities of care and health provision,
Financial pressures to spend, spend, spend,
Invasions of private lives by the state,
Immorality within national economies

Show us the light of our Saviour Jesus Christ,
Which leads people through this darkness;
And brings us even now to the place of peace,
That peace which is truly, *'faith, hope and love'*.

Bible Passage

2 Samuel 6:12-19

¹² King David was told,

"The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God."

So David went and brought the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom up to the city of David with rejoicing. ¹³ When those who carried the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, David sacrificed an ox and a fattened calf, ¹⁴ and David danced before the Lord with all his might, wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets!

¹⁶ When 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 They brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place within the tent that David had pitched for it. David then presented burnt offerings and fellowship sacrifices before the Lord.

¹⁸ When David had finished presenting these sacrifices, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, ¹⁹ and distributed food among the whole gathering of Israel, both men and women. He gave them each a loaf of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins, after which all the people went back to their homes.

Review

At last, David brought the Ark into Jerusalem and set it up. It seems that the original Tabernacle tent had not survived, perhaps destroyed by the Philistines (1 Sam 5,6), so David provided a replacement tent (6:17). Today's reading is full of optimism. David brings the Ark to Jerusalem with great celebration (6:12-15), then sets it in its place (6:17), offers sacrifices (6:17), before blessing the people (6:18) and giving everyone food (6:19). And as we cannot forget, David dances before the Lord wearing, frankly, not very much (6:14f - see 16:20)!

Everything was going well, but there are some frayed edges to the story. In the intervening verses of our selected readings (6:6-11), you will read that after the Ark began its journey, there was a set-back. A man standing by the Ark had died (6:7) and everyone believed God was angry! The young man, possibly one of David's nephews (see yesterday's study), had only sought to steady the Ark! In the ensuing inquest, David lodged the Ark with a man called Obed-Edom, and everything had come to a temporary halt.

Then, verse 16 reminds us that not everyone was happy with David! Michal was Saul's daughter and David's first wife (1 Sam 18:21f.), and she was decidedly unhappy with her husband. She did not like his free-range worship, and we will certainly hear more of this (6:20-23)!

Yet we cannot ignore these amazing scenes. Israel had been in the religious wilderness, and now the newly anointed king of all Israel acted with authority, even as a high priest (see the priestly ephod 6:14 and David's presiding at sacrifices 6:18), to establish the worship of the Lord in Jerusalem. Sometimes God's people must persist through trial and difficulty to do what is right.

Going Deeper

More about the death of Uzzah

If we want to understand the death of Uzzah, and what happened to the Ark on its journey from Kiriath-Jearim to Obed-Edom to Jerusalem, then we must refer to the book of 1 Chronicles, which covers much of the same story as found in 2 Samuel (just as 2 Chronicles parallels 1 and 2 Kings). We may be used to reading differing accounts of the life of Jesus in the New Testament and accept each Gospel's different perspectives on Jesus and His ministry, but we are not used to anything similar in the Old Testament.

So we must turn to 1 Chron. 6:29, which names Uzzah as a priest, responsible with others for the new worship, and authorised by David. Now, the incident with the cart carrying the Ark is recorded in 1 Chronicles 13:4-14, and referred to in 1 Chronicles 15:12f. Here, Uzzah's death is reckoned to have happened because the priests did not carry the Ark properly. It had been put on a cart, just as the Philistines had done, and not carried on poles as originally designed and prescribed by Moses (Exodus 25:13f.), so no one would have to touch it.

The Ark could only continue towards Jerusalem when fault was rectified, and it appears that the priests rediscovered the ancient rules prescribing the Ark and their worship of God (as found in Exodus and Leviticus). This was not just revival just because good times had come and a new king had made his mark, it was a revival of the worship of the living God by His people. So while God accepted the new worship commissioned by David, the details about how to carry the Ark were still important. The Ark, and God's relationship with His people were 'on the move'!

Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem from the house of Obed-Edom

While all this was being sorted out, the Ark was housed at the home of Obed-Edom, and it had done him no harm! Indeed, the presence of the Ark was generally reckoned to have been of benefit to the entire family (6:12). This was of great interest to David, because he wanted the Ark to be a blessing to him and to his new home in Jerusalem, as well as the centre piece of the worship of the Lord.

Although this is not reported here in 2 Samuel, it seems that after correction about the right way to carry the Ark from levitical priests (1 Chron 15:12f.), he was willing to continue to take the Ark to Jerusalem, and as it says here, '*David ... brought the Ark ... up to the city of David with rejoicing*' (6:12).

A new pattern of worship

David was at last able to 'let his hair down' and worship the Lord with the liberty of knowing that he had completed the journey that the Lord has set before him. He had learned hard lessons about walking in the ways of the Lord on his long journey, but it seems that David had learned something more from the priests.

The Ark was originally designed as a centre for sacrificial worship (Exodus 36-40), so where David had previously organised worship to reflect his own love of music (6:5), the worship he now organised was different. He continued to use music with a fair degree of flair and enthusiasm; the worship had a carnival atmosphere of, '*rejoicing ... David danced ... and all Israel worshipped ... with shouts and the sound of trumpets!*' (6:12-15). However, at every six paces on the journey to Jerusalem, David included the relatively 'old fashioned' worship feature of sacrificial offering (6:13)! The record in 1 Chronicles suggests that the priests had given him further guidance about the appropriate use of certain sacrifices. By themselves, they may have been 'for' or 'against' David's new worship style, but they had made their point!

Here, David showed he was still willing to learn from the Lord. The entry into Jerusalem of the Ark of the Covenant was a unique time for joy and celebration which would never come again!

Michal's problems

This great celebration had its detractors, however. The tragic figure of Michal challenged the joyous David and she mocked the way he behaved (6:16). David's relationship with Michal was complicated. He had married her while she was a young princess in the court of her father king Saul, and as such, she was strongly linked in people's minds with her father, the old king. When David was evicted from court, Michal helped her young husband escape, and the story of this dramatic event is romantically touching (1 Sam 19:11-17). However, David never came back for her and neither could she escape the court, so her father had her married to another man, named Palti (1 Sam 25:44). Then, when David became king, he insisted that Michal be returned to him as his wife, and the story of Palti's abject sorrow at losing his beloved wife to the king makes truly sorrowful reading (2 Sam 3:13-16).

There is no doubt that while David was supremely happy, his wife Michal was in despair at his actions, even before the incident of his dancing when she '*despised him in her heart*' (6:16). Tomorrow, we will learn more of this and discover how David dealt with this situation. But for today, we must rejoice that David focussed on the right thing to do for all God's people by bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, and the great celebration concluded with David distributing food to everyone as a traditional Jewish sign of fellowship.

The feast!

One thing about the sacrificial worship we easily forget is that it provided a community of people with food! The sacrificial system as described in Leviticus prescribes a way for all food to be offered to God before being slaughtered, prepared and eaten, and these Scriptures prepare us for the way Jesus spoke about His own body as the sacrificed 'Bread of life'. Indeed, feasting was a major part of the ritual worship of God in Old Testament times (Leviticus 2,3).

If we think about what was happening here in this Scripture, then an animal was sacrificed every six paces (6:13) on a journey of around five miles! It is not surprising therefore that at the end of the great celebration, David was able to hand out a large amount of food to all those who had taken part in the celebration, '*a loaf of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins ...*' (6:19). The bakers must have been baking overtime, but after the sacrifices, there was plenty of good meat on offer!

Discipleship

Application

Infectious and joyous worship!

There are occasions in the life of God's people when our happiness and joy flow over into the praise of God, and the result is infectious and joyous worship. You may have experienced times such as this, and they can be life-changing for everyone involved. Our reading today describes one such day.

Certainly, we see here something of the wisdom of integrating old and new in worship, a point not often made from Scripture, but certainly to be found. Too often, people quote Jesus' comment about the new wine and the old wineskins (Matt 9:17f.), and assume that it speaks of ditching everything 'old' in favour of what is the latest in music and worship fashion. How wrong they are. Jesus was speaking of the Old and New Covenants of God and the difference between a Covenant of Law and that of Grace. Of that, Scripture is very clear. If we really want to read about worship in Scripture, then passages such as this that describe what was actually done at real events of worship in Old Testament times will teach us much. We will find there more depth to God's gracious wisdom than mere dismissal of what is old fashioned.

Worship and food

One feature of this passage is the way in which worship and food goes together. As I have already pointed out, this was a feature of Old Testament worship! Today we sometimes share the 'Lord's Supper' which has elements of food within a service worship. However, the model of 'Alpha' meetings has taken this principle further. Groups meet over food to share fellowship and then talk to each other to find God and share His blessings. Surely there can be more ways for us to get together to be God's people and share food in fellowship and worship, all together! I certainly believe the Bible suggests this would be good and a worthwhile way of building up the people of God.

Returning the Ark

Whilst we have concentrated on the worship within this text, the cause of it was David's decision to bring the Ark of the Covenant to a proper resting place within Israel. There is no direct physical equivalent of the 'Ark' today, but there is a spiritual one. Perhaps the only way that worship can truly be renewed in the lives of God's people is when they decide to restore the Lord to His proper place in their personal lives, and/or, the life of the church. In David's time, whatever the reasons for the 'Ark' not having been where it should at the heart of the life of the people of Israel, its return to its rightful place enabled God to work through David to renew the worship of the people of God by both re-invigorating the old and personally encouraging the new.

Ideas for what to do

- Have you experienced times of renewal that have been reflected in a change in the way you worship the Lord? I do not want to press this matter as if there is anything wrong with your worship, but the question deserves to be answered, and reflects the real experience of many people
- How can God's presence be restored in the centre of your life? Pray about this.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How much do you know about the 'Ark of the Covenant', and what it meant to God's people? Use any reference book you may have to find out more.
2. Share in group discussion any events in your life that have any spiritual similarities with 'bringing the Ark to Jerusalem'.
3. Should our worship of the Lord always be fundamentally the same? Is it possible to do 'new things' in worship without using modern technology?

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, bless my soul that I might offer You the true worship of the sacrifice of my whole life. The world does not understand this, and sometime I do not understand this, but within such commitment lies my eternal destiny, as I seek to do now what I shall one day do for all eternity; praise You. Thank You, Lord Jesus.
