

Prayers

To God

Weekly theme: the glory of God

Think about this; what does the glory of God feel like? As you reflect on this, pray for the Lord to make His glory known to you, in its beauty and truth.

For myself

Pray for any critical situation you face today; perhaps this is one single thing, perhaps it is many things that roll together. Release your own angst and anxiety to the Father and allow Him to calm your soul.

For others

Blessed Lord and Father of all, come to us with mercy to mend our fallen world. Open our eyes to see the injustices by which we are all held and for which we all bear guilt, whether of prejudice or pride, of greed or unforgiveness, or of any other latent evil we struggle to control. Come to us in power to challenge our fallen world, and make us anew we pray. **AMEN**

Meditation

Where may the human spirit begin to find peace within this world?

In the company of other believers?
Whilst doing the work of the Kingdom?
In the home where love and care dwell?
Doing the work we have been given in faithful service?
Lost in the worship of 'wonder love and praise'?
On the streets where Jesus walks with strangers?
Speaking out for the poor and the oppressed?
In the quiet place of Bible study and prayer?
Or in some new venture not yet 'gained'?

Or is it just that peace may be found when we find
God is present in every circumstance of life,
And peace is found when we open our eyes
and see Him with us everywhere, anywhere;
For now, for evermore, until the end of time ...

Bible Passage

2 Samuel 6:20-23

²⁰ When David returned to bless his household, Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said,

"How the king of Israel honoured himself today, exposing himself today in view of the maids of his servants, in full view, like some commoner!"

²¹ David replied to Michal,

"It was before the Lord that I danced, the Lord who chose me in place of your father and his dynasty. He appointed me ruler of Israel, the people of the Lord. ²² I will make myself more contemptible than this, and even humiliate myself; but I will indeed be held in honour by the very girls of whom you have spoken!"

²³ And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

Review

David had brought the Ark to his new home in Jerusalem, in a procession of worship using both old and new forms of worship within an atmosphere of celebration and joy. David was the leader of this worship, 'dancing' clothed in a priestly, linen 'ephod' (6:14). But as he arrived in Jerusalem with the Ark, he was met by the one person who could have challenged him on that extraordinary day; his wife.

Much has been written about Michal's rejection of David's dancing before the Lord, and her cutting comments, '*how the king of Israel honoured himself today, exposing himself in view of the maids and servants ...*' (6:20). We can almost hear her speaking even though these words are centuries old.

David's defence against this was only to explain himself without shame. He had done nothing wrong before God, and to his first wife, the woman who had once helped him escape the clutches of her father's mania (1 Sam 18:20f.), he insisted '*the Lord ... chose me in place of your father and his dynasty ...*' (6:21). He insists he would make himself '*more contemptible than this*' (6:22) in the worship of God, even '*humiliate myself*', but for David, worship itself was more important than the opinions of those watching.

We may be shocked by the last verse, however, because it reads like a curse on the poor Michal; after all she had endured, '*she had no child to the day of her death*' (6:23). Perhaps she deserved some love and care! But this verse is no formal curse and we misunderstand it. Earlier, David mentioned something that will become essential to our understanding of His story throughout 2 Samuel, when he spoke in terms of 'dynasty' (6:21). David was establishing a dynasty, and this verse simply records that his wife Michal bore him no successor. She was not going to figure in the ancestry of God's Messiah! That honour would go to another woman, Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11f.)

Going Deeper

Michal's angst

When David negotiated the re-unification of Israel with Abner (2 Sam 3:13,14), he insisted Michal should be brought to him as proof of the allegiance of the northern tribes. She was already a victim of the politics of the day. As she takes centre stage in this passage, we remember that Michal helped David escape from the clutches of her father, King Saul (1 Samuel 17:11ff). But despite Michal's clear love for David at first, when he went into exile, Saul had married her off to Palti (sometimes translated Paltiel) the son of Laish (1 Samuel 25:44). At the point she was brought to David after her father's death, she was devastatingly separated from her husband, a man who clearly loved her dearly; *'her husband went with her, weeping as he walked behind her'* (2 Sam 3:15,16). Palti was then sent packing by Abner the army commander (2 Sam 3:16) and the results are not surprising.

As David came to Jerusalem at the height of the great celebration of worship to Almighty God, he was 'on a high', still overflowing with the spirit of praise that had clearly been present in him as he danced and led exciting new creative worship before the Ark of the Covenant and before the Lord. But he found his beloved Michal, who had risked her life for him years ago when he fled the paranoid King Saul (1 Sam 19:11ff) was no longer the woman he married in his youth.

It is easy for us to read too much into this difficult personal exchange. Was Michal genuinely annoyed with David's display because she did not understand his worship of God? Was she annoyed that David had danced *'exposing himself'* (6:20), thus debasing her as his wife? Was she furious at the manner in which she had been pulled away from her previous husband, and determined to humiliate him in his hour of victory?

David's exposure

Many theories have been advanced about exactly what David was doing when Michal accused him of exposing himself. However, one of them can be dismissed. This is the idea that David danced naked. Some think this is what happened simply because ecstatic and naked dancing before 'gods' was a common activity in ancient times, widely attested in ancient literature of the surrounding nations, and also in the Bible (1 Samuel 19:24). So when verse 20 describes David as *'exposing himself'* where earlier the text says he danced in a *'linen ephod'* (6:14), we must decide what we think was going on.

If Michal had seen David dancing naked she would undoubtedly have expressed disgust at him and his exposure before *'maids'* (6:20). But there are other explanations. Israel was not like other nations in the way it worshipped God, as is clear from both Scripture and other ancient documents. Secondly, in Hebrew, the talk of exposure does not necessarily mean nakedness; the word association is modern not ancient. The writers of Samuel had a Hebrew word meaning 'naked' that they used elsewhere in the text (1 Sam 19:24), but this word is not used here. 'Exposed' could mean a number of things. Thirdly, the word *'ephod'* referring to the garment worn by David (6:14) has never been properly understood in Hebrew. It was a linen garment, and Exodus certainly talks of one such garment being embroidered and ordained for priestly use (Exodus 28:4ff). But the word could simply mean simply 'vest'!

This last explanation fits our story perfectly well. David wore a light vest like garment when dancing before the Lord, something that simply allowed him free movement as required by dancing, instead of his more weighty royal robes. Michal was not impressed, but David was sure that his example would be appreciated (6:22)

David's justification - being 'contemptible'

One interesting feature of David's defence against Michal is his stated desire to be made '*more contemptible*' before God, '*even humiliate myself*' (6:22). There is some evidence that early preachers took this idea when advocating a penitential approach to God in worship; the sinner should only come to God acknowledging his or her vile state before the holiness of God. Certainly, this was the language used by the famous preacher John Wesley, centuries later in the eighteenth century religious revival that swept England and later, the USA.

There is hint of this also in the writings of Paul, where he glories in the persecution endured for the sake of Christ (2 Cor 4:7f.). He also uses similar language when he speaks of the glory of the incarnation, in which Jesus became 'humble' in humanity in order to bring us salvation (Philippians 2:4-11). David was the first who used the language of being willing to be 'brought low' before God in worship, so that God might bless his worship, but he meant abandoning himself to God rather than merely grovelling as a sinner!

The future dynasty

David stood before Michal bearing her rebuke on a wonderful day for Israel. He was the anointed King, and God had decreed that his dynasty would rule all Israel in place of her father, and he insisted he would worship the Lord as he chose, and eventually be honoured by all for so doing (6:22). One can only imagine the tension and sorrow as this sharp conversation broke the relationship between Michal and David.

The final verse of our passage indicates that Michal would certainly not bear David's heir. Ultimately, we are not told all the reasons for what happened, and we only receive glimpses of a complex story of David's first marriage. From the point of view of the writers of 2 Samuel, there was an underlying concern for who would become King after David. God would soon promise David that '*one of his line*' would be on the throne of Israel for ever (2 Sam 7:12), but much of the intrigue of 2 Samuel surrounds the question of who would come next; this lineage was important to Israel identity and to their God.

David had already fathered a number of children by a number of wives (see 1 Sam 25:43, 2 Sam 3:1-5). Now if David were to have a son by Michal, then if she had a son, he would probably be accepted as the natural heir above the other sons, because of Michal's position as Saul's daughter. But if we read the story of 1 and 2 Samuel carefully, we should be in no doubt that God wanted nothing to do with the lineage of Saul, Israel's first king, and certainly keep him away from His plans for the redemption of the world.

Discipleship

Application

Evil finds a way

The tragic story of David and Michal is perhaps unique, but it illustrates how evil can worm its way into any occasion, even great and important occasions when the Spirit of God moved creatively to inspire new worship in Israel at the bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem.

Also, the books of 1 and 2 Samuel find a subtle way of charting the pathway of God's grace and favour to David and eventually his heir, Solomon, the man who would build the Temple. This would be the lineage that would bring God's Messiah to earth, Jesus, 'Son of David', and it was important that David's life and the records of it contained the godliness of a man who repented of his sin, not the godlessness of a man such as Saul who could not face the consequences of his sin (see 1 Sam 14,15).

The relationship of a man and a woman in marriage

Men and women were created by God to be one in Him (Gen 1:27), and it is fundamental to His work amongst people that this should unity be honoured. When relationships break down, this work of God is compromised, and many of us will know of tragic stories of where marriage has broken down because of any number of circumstances of life. There is no 'taking of sides' in the story of David and Michal, just as there is little to be gained in taking sides between divorced couples. This is one small place within Scripture where we find a certain level of understanding from God towards a broken marriage, for although Michal was not able to bear children and perhaps became bitter of heart, she is not rejected by God, and neither is David rejected for his failure here.

We should probably have sympathy for Michal and the poor treatment she received from her father and perhaps from David. We should not fail to respect the uprightness of David for not accepting Michal's rebuke; he did the right thing to defend the spirit of praise he had shown during the celebrations. So despite personal problems, David sustained what he thought right before God, which meant that God was able to continue his work through David.

Ideas for what to do

- The challenge that this passage presents is to keep our personal relationships right, both with the people concerned and with God. Satan can and will use what is near and dear to us to try and upset what we do for the Kingdom. We must live this truth.
- Pray for any you know who are troubled by their marriages and fear the possibility of divorce. Pray for them to be held together by God's love, and pray that whatever happens, both will know God's mercy and care.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Was David justified in replying strongly to Michal? Do you think that he could or should have saved his relationship with Michal by being more understanding?
2. John Wesley used verse 22 to justify his preaching in the open air, saying he was happy to be 'so vile' as to do this. In what ways can or should we become 'more contemptible' for the sake of the Gospel?
3. Do your personal relationships help or hinder the work of the Gospel?

Final Prayer

In Your providence, Lord God, keep the families of Your servants safe from the attacks of the evil one. Grant them such a presence of Your holy Spirit that they may know Your care and love for them at all times; and may the whole church be blessed through the families of those who work for You in any capacity. Thank You, Lord; AMEN