

Obedience as Worship

Walt Disney was once asked how it felt to be a celebrity. "It feels fine," he replied, "when it helps to get a good seat for a football game. But it never helped me to make a good film or a good shot in a polo game, or command the obedience of my daughter. It doesn't even seem to keep fleas off our dogs - and if being a celebrity won't give one an advantage over a couple of fleas, then I guess there can't be much in being a celebrity after all."

- I wonder if that's how God feels sometimes
 - The maker of Heavens and Earth
 - The author and perfecter of our faith
 - The Righteous King and Judge
 - Yet, for all His deserved glory and "celebrity," it's remarkable how little that seems to buy Him
 - Among the unbelieving world, of course, He is mocked rather than worshipped
 - And even among His children, God often receives a superficial form of worship
- What kind of worship does God expect from His Church?
 - Beginning a look at worship...
 - And to be clear, what do I mean by worship?
 - For some, the work simply refers to the part of the church service devoted to singing praise music
 - Or maybe watching other people sing to praise music
 - Well, that's a part of worship, certainly,
 - It's only a small part of it
 - Worship in the fullest sense is so much more
 - The Bible commands worship as a daily way of life
 - Not a once-per-week, 35-minute performance

- We begin our examination of worship by looking at a moment in the life of David, taken from 1Chronicles 13&14

[1Chr. 13:1](#) ¶ Then David consulted with the captains of the thousands and the hundreds, even with every leader.

[1Chr. 13:2](#) David said to all the assembly of Israel, "If it seems good to you, and if it is from the LORD our God, let us send everywhere to our kinsmen who remain in all the land of Israel, also to the priests and Levites who are with them in their cities with pasture lands, that they may meet with us;

[1Chr. 13:3](#) and let us bring back the ark of our God to us, for we did not seek it in the days of Saul."

[1Chr. 13:4](#) Then all the assembly said that they would do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people.

- This scene in 1Chr 13 takes place in 977 BC
 - David has achieved his rightful place as king over the nation of Israel
 - In Chapter 11&12 of 1Chron we can read how David received the support of all Israel, including those previously aligned with the family of Saul
 - David's coronation is performed
 - And the nation rejoices to be united under David's rule
 - David promptly leads the nation of Israel in conquest of Jebus
 - Jebus was the city of the Jebusites
 - Following David's conquest, it became known as the city of David...Jerusalem
 - Then Chapter 13 gives us one of David's first official acts as the king over Israel ruling from Jerusalem
 - He proposes to bring the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem
- The Ark of course is Ark of the Covenant
 - It's the golden chest built by the Israelites in the desert according to God's instructions in Exodus 24

- The Ark held the Ten Commandments, and for a time it also held a jar of manna and the budding staff of Aaron
- And on top of the Ark was the mercy seat, guarded by cherubim
- The Ark was important to Israel for one reason more than any other
 - It was the specific meeting place of God with His people
 - Listen to God's description of the ark from Exo 25

[Ex. 25:21](#) "You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you.

[Ex. 25:22](#) "There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.

- The ark was the appointed place for God to appear and tabernacle with men
 - Consequently, it came with specific rules for how it must be honored
 - For example, no one could look upon the Ark or into the Ark or else they would die
 - So it was always covered with animals skins and a blue cloth
 - It must be handled in specific ways and only by the descendents of one of Levi's sons: the Kohathites
 - The Ark also served as a token of God's power and grace among men
 - In the desert, it always preceded the Israelites in their wanderings showing the way
 - It held back to the waters of the Jordan as the nation crossed into the promised land
 - It accompanied Joshua in the march around Jericho
- The ark initially rested inside the tabernacle in the desert
 - Once the Israelites rested in Canaan, it rested in the tabernacle in Shiloh, until the reign of Israel's last judge, Samuel
 - Later it was installed inside Solomon's temple

- But it was always the physical place God's invisible holy presence was understood to rest
 - It was an unapproachable holiness
 - The visible reality of God dwelling among men
- Back to 1Chron 13, the Ark is no longer in the Temple at Shiloh
 - In fact, it's not even in the care of the priests, as required in the Law
 - It's in the small Judah town of Kiriath-jearim
 - In the private home of a man named Abinidad
 - Being cared for by his son, Eleazer
 - The Ark found it's way to Abinidad's home in a curious way (1Sam 4-7)
 - Two years earlier, the Philistines had captured the Ark during a battle, and had taken it back to Ashdod, their main city
 - The king of Israel at that time was Saul
 - And it had been Saul's fault that the Ark had been captured,
 - Saul viewed it as some kind of holy relic that he could manipulate for his own purposes
 - And he had called it into battle against God's wishes
 - So Saul's army was routed and the Ark was captured
 - In characteristic style, Saul didn't show any interested in recapturing the Ark
 - So it sat in the camp of the Philistines for 2 years
- Nevertheless, God's anger burned against the Philistines for having taken the Ark
 - And they felt His wrath in a most uncomfortable way
 - On their backsides, in the form of giant hemorrhoids
 - So they devised a plan to return the Ark to Israel on their own

- They returned the Ark on a cart pulled by two nursing cows, which God supernaturally directed to walk directly to Beth-shemesh, a city in Israel
 - The Israelites were so happy to see the Ark return, they slaughtered the two delivery cows and offered them up as a sacrifice
 - Now you know understand why your UPS driver drops your package at the door and runs back to his truck
- The excitement over the return of the Ark caused a problem though

[1Sam. 6:19](#) ¶ He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck down of all the people, 50,070 men, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter.

[1Sam. 6:20](#) The men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall He go up from us?"

[1Sam. 6:21](#) So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up to you."

[1Sam. 7:1](#) ¶ And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took the ark of the LORD and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.

- Here we see one of those rules for respecting the Ark
 - God had specified in Numbers 4 that no one may look upon the Ark or it's contents or else die
 - So when the men of Beth-Shemesh disobeyed the word of God, they were struck down immediately for their irreverence
 - Isn't curious to us to think that these men were struck down in this way.
 - They were simply celebrating the return of the Ark
 - And presumably were excited because it mean that they could again possess and respect God's holy vessel
 - The holy meeting place He established with men
 - They were celebrating God Himself, worshipping Him, pleased that He had returned the Ark to them

- And yet in their exuberance they disobeyed God’s word, and He judged them for it
 - Perhaps we wonder, if only for a moment, if God was fair to do this?
 - Couldn’t He overlook their mistake and simply take note of their joy for its return?
- Well, naturally the people of Beth-shemesh react in fear and demand the Ark be removed from their town
 - They say who can stand before this Holy God?
 - In other words, who is good enough to stand before Him and not suffer His wrath for sin?
 - So they called for men of Qiryath Yearim to come claim the Ark
 - This was a city about 9 mile West of present-day Jerusalem
 - The “city of forests”
 - Where it finally comes to rest in the home of Abinidat for twenty years
 - Talk about a conversation piece
 - I guess it was a coffee table
- So back to 1Chron 13, David now is seated on the throne in Jerusalem
 - And about 9 miles away sits the Ark in Abinidat’s home
 - So David consults with the Army and says let’s go get the Ark
 - Now the text we read in 1Chron doesn’t give us any clear reason for David’s interest in the Ark
 - But we can understand his interest from looking ahead in the story to find the moment when David brings the Ark into Jerusalem
 - We’re told at the end of 1Chron 15 that David is leaping and celebrating in the streets of Israel as the Ark is carried to his new home

- It seems clear that David took true joy in restoring the Ark to its proper place
 - I believe David's interest in the Ark stems from his desire to worship God
 - After all, David we know was a man after God's own heart
 - And in David's day, the true worship revolved around the tabernacle and the Ark of the Testimony
 - So David initiates this campaign to retrieve the Ark and return it to its rightful place in Jerusalem
- Now watch what happens as we read further in 1Chron 13

[1Chr. 13:5](#) ¶ So David assembled all Israel together, from the Shihor of Egypt even to the entrance of Hamath, to bring the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim.

[1Chr. 13:6](#) David and all Israel went up to Baalah, *that is*, to Kiriath-jearim, which belongs to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, the LORD who is enthroned *above* the cherubim, where His name is called.

[1Chr. 13:7](#) They carried the ark of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart.

[1Chr. 13:8](#) David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all *their* might, even with songs and with lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals and with trumpets.

[1Chr. 13:9](#) ¶ When they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, because the oxen nearly upset *it*.

[1Chr. 13:10](#) The anger of the LORD burned against Uzza, so He struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark; and he died there before God.

[1Chr. 13:11](#) Then David became angry because of the LORD'S outburst against Uzza; and he called that place Perez-uzza to this day.

[1Chr. 13:12](#) David was afraid of God that day, saying, "How can I bring the ark of God *home* to me?"

[1Chr. 13:13](#) So David did not take the ark with him to the city of David, but took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite.

[1Chr. 13:14](#) Thus the ark of God remained with the family of Obed-edom in his house three months; and the LORD blessed the family of Obed-edom with all that he had.

- This story sounds familiar doesn't it?
 - Here's another group of men celebrating the Ark's return and trying to do the right thing by God
 - But again, it's all fun and games until someone gets hurt

- And in this case, Uzza dies at God's hand
- This Ark seems like bad news,
- Take a second look at the details in the verses I just read
 - David instructs the men to load the Ark on a cart likely pulled by oxen
 - David seems to be trying to honor God, because he chooses a new cart
 - It was consecrated to the Lord
 - The idea was that no cart designated for ordinary use could ever be put to use for royal or holy purposes
 - And then as the Ark is being moved to Jerusalem, it begins to tip
 - The roads to Jerusalem included some difficult mountainous terrain, so the cart must have begun to tip at one point
 - So Uzza does the only thing any responsible servant would have done
 - He reaches out to protect the holy Ark
 - But as he touches it, he offends God
 - And Gods strikes Uzza down for his offense
 - Now why does God continue to strike down men who are trying to do the right thing by His Ark?
 - Well, the answer comes from Numbers 4

[Num. 4:15](#) "When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy *objects* and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is to set out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry *them*, so that they will not touch the holy *objects* and die. These are the things in the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.

[Num. 4:16](#) ¶ "The responsibility of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest is the oil for the light and the fragrant incense and the continual grain offering and the anointing oil—the responsibility of all the tabernacle and of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings."

[Num. 4:17](#) ¶ Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,

[Num. 4:18](#) "Do not let the tribe of the families of the Kohathites be cut off from among the Levites.

[Num. 4:19](#) "But do this to them that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy *objects*: Aaron and his sons shall go in and assign each of them to his work and to his load;

[Num. 4:20](#) but they shall not go in to see the holy *objects* even for a moment, or they will die."

- The book of Numbers records God's very specific instructions on how the nation of Israel was to carry the Ark whenever the camp of Israel set out
 - God specified a certain family within the tribe of Levi, the descendents of Kohathites
 - Earlier in Numbers 4, God has specified that the Ark must be carried by these men using wooden poles overlaid with gold
 - The pole slipped through rings on the side of the Ark
 - And the entire Ark must be covered with special cloth and animals skins so as to not be visible
- But how did David choose to carry it?
 - He placed it in a cart drawn by oxen
 - I wonder where David got the idea to bring the Ark to Jerusalem in that way?
 - I think there are two likely reasons
 - First, I think it was easier
 - It would have been a very difficult trip for a small group of men to carry the heavy Ark 9 miles through difficult mountainous terrain
 - It's was much more expedient to place it on a cart drawn by oxen
 - I can almost hear David's men saying, "Oh the pole method went out of fashion long ago. Everyone is using oxen and carts these days."
 - So the first reason David choose a cart was because it seemed a better way to him
 - The second reason is probably because of precedent

- Remember the way the Ark found its way from Ashdod to Bethshemesh?
 - The Philistines placed it on a cart and allowed two cows to draw it to Israel
- I suspect that whatever hesitation David may have had in using a cart...
 - He set aside his concern when someone reminded him how God had once before allowed a cart to be used to transport the Ark
- But David failed to recognize two difference between him and the Philistines
 - First, God was responsible for directing the Philistines cart back to Israel
 - The Bible tells us the at the Philistines devised a test to learn if their ailments were the result of the Ark
 - They selected two mother cows and separated them from their nursing calves who were nearby
 - When the mothers were yoked to the cart, the Philistines watched to see if they would take the Ark to Israel or if they would return to their hungry calves
 - The cows went against instinct and walked away from their calves and toward Israel
 - So the Philistines knew that God was responsible for their suffering and that the Ark belonged in Israel
 - The second thing David overlooked was how he and the Israelites enjoyed the benefit of God's revelation that the Philistines never had
 - The Philistines never had God's Law, so they had no understanding of God's requirements for handling the Ark
 - Secondly, they had no access to Levitical priests
 - Had they know the Law, they still couldn't have complied
 - Therefore, God didn't hold the Philistine's ignorance against them

- If God wanted the Philistines to return the Ark to the Israelites, He had to allow the Ark to be transported in an unorthodox manner
- Despite these important differences, David was determined to follow the Philistines example
 - And by following the example of the ungodly world, David set aside the Law of God
 - David's decision leads to disaster
 - Uzza tries to steady the Ark, and he dies as punishment
 - I think it's accurate to say that David was responsible for Uzza's death
 - I suspect that our the church in our day might struggle a little bit with this story
 - Something about it seems unfair
 - It seems unfair that God struck down the men of Beth-shemesh and later Uzza when all they wanted to do was worship God through their joy over the return of the Ark
 - The men of Beth-Shemesh were probably just too excited to remember that they shouldn't look in the Ark
 - And Uzza was just trying to protect the Ark from damage, after all
 - We want to see God give them credit for effort, don't we?
 - We expect God to overlook the mistake of the men of Beth-shemesh since they were just celebrated the return of God's glory
 - We want to see God give David credit for his desire to bring the Ark back even if his method wasn't exactly correct
 - In other words, we expect God's ways to be like men's ways
 - Because when we see someone doing the wrong thing for the right reason, we're usually willing to overlook their mistakes
 - Like Robin Hood, who stole from the rich to give to the poor

- Or maybe when our kids lie to tell Grandma they love her cabbage stew
 - It's the thought that counts, right?
- For God, it's obedience that counts
 - Remember the words of Samuel spoken to Saul?

[1Sam. 15:22](#) Samuel said,

"Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams.

[1Sam. 15:23](#) "For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
He has also rejected you from *being* king."

- Samuel says that the ultimate and purest form of worship we can offer God is our obedience to His word
 - Sacrifice was instituted to cover sin
 - And sin is disobedience to God's word
 - Obey His word, and there would be no need for sacrifice
- The word of God stands as an unchanging, uncompromising standard of obedience
 - And we are not free to alter God's standard regardless of our good intentions
- God prescribed a proper way to move and handle the Ark
 - And David and the men of Beth-shemesh knew precisely what God's word prescribed for such things
 - So ironically, when they were intent on worshipping God by transporting the Ark, they actually demonstrated the opposite of worship by virtue of their failure to obey God's word

- You know we can make this same mistake today, and churches often do
 - We think that God will judge our intentions rather than our choices and decisions
 - For example, the church is called to worship in Spirit and in Truth
 - Which essentially means to worship in the power and direction of the Holy Spirit
 - And according to the Word of God
 - But in some churches today, the power of the Spirit has been replaced by the excitement of emotion and experience
 - And the unvarnished truth of God's word has been set aside in favor of pop psychology interspersed with heartwarming stories
 - But God isn't interested in our good intentions
 - Nor is He impressed by our better ideas or our improvements, as in the case of David and his new cart
 - What impresses our Lord is our obedience
 - In Romans 12, Paul tells the church

[Rom. 12:1](#) ¶ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

[Rom. 12:2](#) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- When we present our bodies
 - Which means our very lives to God
 - And do so in an acceptable way, according to the word of God
 - We are performing our spiritual service of worship
 - Anyone can come into a building like this once a week, stand and sit at the appropriate times, and sing along to catchy tunes

- But true worship is a lifestyle, not a performance
- And look at how Paul says we can be transformed for that very purpose
 - By the renewing of our minds
 - So that we will prove the will God
 - In other words, so we can demonstrate the will of God through our obedience
- As we end today, there is a happy ending to David's story in 1Chron
 - David eventually understood his error and corrected it

[1Chr. 15:1](#) ¶ Now *David* built houses for himself in the city of David; and he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it.

[1Chr. 15:2](#) Then David said, "No one is to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for the LORD chose them to carry the ark of God and to minister to Him forever."

[1Chr. 15:3](#) And David assembled all Israel at Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the LORD to its place which he had prepared for it.

[1Chr. 15:11](#) ¶ Then David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites, for Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab,

[1Chr. 15:12](#) and said to them, "You are the heads of the fathers' *households* of the Levites; consecrate yourselves both you and your relatives, that you may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel to *the place* that I have prepared for it.

[1Chr. 15:13](#) "Because you did not *carry it* at the first, the LORD our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance."

[1Chr. 15:14](#) So the priests and the Levites consecrated themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel.

[1Chr. 15:15](#) The sons of the Levites carried the ark of God on their shoulders with the poles thereon, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD.

- Because we did not seek God according to His ordinance
 - According to His word
 - Therefore the Lord made an outburst to us (brought violence against us)
- So David directed the priests to carry the Ark according to God's instructions
 - And the city rejoiced as the Ark entered Jerusalem
- Let us follow David's example, hopefully without stumbling as he did