

An abstract graphic featuring a dark background with several horizontal lines in shades of blue and green. On the right side, these lines curve upwards and outwards, creating a sense of depth and movement. The word "HIGHER" is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the graphic.

HIGHER

Sermon Growth Guide

May 7, 2023

Worthy of Celebration



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Higher - “Worthy of Celebration”

1 Chronicles 15:26-16:4

Key Verse: 1 Chronicles 15:28 “So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouts, with the sounding of rams’ horns and trumpets, and of cymbals, and the playing of lyres and harps.”

Big Idea: God is worthy of extravagant celebration, exaltation, and praise!

Foundations

This is a full and many-faceted story, but most of all, it is filled with the exuberance of the entire community that has gathered to praise God for His presence with them. The celebration is shaped by listening to God’s Word for guidance.

The Levites carry the ark as instructed. Sacrifices are made. Musicians make this procession a real parade. This is a festal event, and no expense has been spared. Joy and obedience are the hallmarks of this day.

The people, their priests, and their king give expression to the powerful emotions that have welled up within them, leading to extravagant corporate worship. This is the beginning of Israel’s recovery of the corporate worship that was given to them in the wilderness. That corporate worship enabled them to remember God’s provision, to give thanks for that. It reminded them of their propensity for sin and their need for a Savior.

With the return of the ark comes the return of corporate worship...worship that demands giving to the Lord the gifts He has given us: music, materials, craftsmanship, expression of emotion. The latter seems to be especially difficult for Presbyterians (insert joke here). *How does this story challenge you?*

Understanding God’s Word

Read 2 Samuel 6: 12-22

This is a parallel story about this event. In his sermon, Pastor Tim addresses the “backstory” of Michal’s relationship with David. Both her father and her husband had used her. Her hurts were deep and so she rejected the celebration of the people, led by David. Like Michal, many have been hurt by the church in many ways. *How is it possible to move from hurt to healing, rather than from hurt to bitterness?*

Applying God’s Word

There are some translations of 1 Chronicles 16:4 that include to *commemorate the acts of God* as part of the Levites’ duties. Essential to praising the Lord is remembering what He has done. Today we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. The feast described in our text foreshadows the feast we experience at the Lord’s Table. *Describe the things you remember about God’s work in your life and for which you give Him praise.*

Witnessing God’s Word

In what ways would you say that your practices of worship might be inviting to those who seem indifferent to the celebration of Almighty God?

For fun: Look up 1 Chronicles 16:3 in the King James version (not the New KJV).

I tried to get volunteers to dance in their boxer shorts today. I really thought a church like ours...anyway. Next week is Mother's Day. I know many of you have already ordered flowers to be delivered. I just wanted to say, what a terrible waste! I mean, they cost money, they don't do anything useful, they just die in a few days. What a waste. Why would you waste all that time and energy and money just to express a little emotion, just to say something you probably could have said in a text message? Of course, you do it. Because of love. Love is what makes it worth it. People think worship is a waste. What a waste. All that time and energy, those church buildings, those instruments, the expense of it all! Did you watch the coronation yesterday? All that for King Charles. What for King Jesus? Remember the woman with the alabaster flask? Nicky Gumbel said, "They will understand your work, but they will never understand your worship." The world understands when a church does something useful, but worship they will never see as anything but a waste.

Last week we were reminded that worship is not a show, it's something we gather to do together because God is worthy of praise. It's love that makes us do it. The pastor said, "What we do up here is not competition for your entertainment dollars or attention. This is a gathering of the people of God, saved by Jesus and marked with the Holy Spirit, who have come to give honor and glory and adoration to the one true God." I remember because I was there. But we do a lot up here. We do our best up here. We lift God **Higher** because God is **Worthy of Celebration** and what we do helps us all see that. The truth is we all worship something. We all have gods,

most important, most treasured. The problem is we worship unworthy things. We worship too small. We worship too low. When we gather, we see the Lord high and lifted up and know once again—the Lord alone is worthy of praise.

What have we learned from David and the ark? First, David intended to bring the ark into Jerusalem to sort of prop up the legitimacy of his new administration. He demonstrated no respect or reverence, and a man called Uzzah died for it by reaching out to touch the ark. David was struck with the fear of the Lord, which was good because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The wisdom he found was that it is wise to search the Scriptures and inquire of God's Word. So, he did. They did together, David and the priests and the Levites, and they determined to move the ark carefully, reverently, according to God's Word. We left off last week with David appointing musicians to sing along the way. What happens when they do it God's way? Rejoicing. "So David and the elders of Israel and the commanders of units of a thousand went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord from the house of Obed-Edom, with rejoicing" (1 Chronicles 15:25).

Along the way, they made sacrifices for atonement for sin. This passage, by the way, is a longer retelling of the same event recorded in 2 Samuel 6. We get a few more details over there about the sacrifices. "When those who were carrying the ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf" (2 Samuel 6:13). Can you imagine that? With every six steps a bull and a fattened calf. That's a lot of blood. That's a lot of meat. What a waste. How serious is sin in the eyes of God? How lethal? How seriously should we take our

sins, our mortal sins, that separate us from the Holy One? Our passage says seven bulls and seven rams. That's a lot of blood. Carefully they walked, in reverence. This is not an empty religious exercise. We are dealing with the living God. They began to feel His presence.

“So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouts, with the sounding of rams' horns and trumpets, and of cymbals, and the playing of lyres and harps” (1 Chronicles 15:28). Many think this is the beginning of the ritual of pilgrimage people would make for Passover each year, walking up the hill to Jerusalem singing and shouting the 15 Songs of Ascent (Psalms 12-134). Back over to 2 Samuel, “Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets” (2 Samuel 6:14-15). David is overcome. He is wrapped up in the passion and the emotion. He loses his cool, drops his royal bearing, and starts dancing in the streets to the glory of the Lord. Do you remember the first time you met Jesus? If you have met Him? People say when they finally open up to Jesus they are surprised by a flood of joy. I was 12 years old at a Young Life camp when I was encouraged not just to think about Jesus, but to go talk to Jesus. I opened the door and submitted my life to Jesus and a flood of joy filled my heart at His presence. It's overwhelming. Have you bent the knee before Jesus your Savior? Many of us sit starving when just in the next room is the banquet of the Lord. Open the door.

But someone was watching David from the window. “As the ark of the covenant of the Lord was entering the City of David, Michal daughter

of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David dancing and celebrating, she despised him in her heart” (1 Chronicles 15:29). What a waste, she thinks. If you've studied this, you have heard about sour old Michal. Such a stick in the mud. Doesn't she see the beauty of abandon? She ought to know that worship needs to be a little loud and raucous and abandoned! Yes. But do you know Michal's story? She was Saul's daughter and was used as a pawn in the contest between Saul and David. She was given to David in marriage as a prize, but that was alright with her because she loved David. “Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him” (1 Samuel 18:20). What did she get in return for her love? David neglected her, mistreated her, and cheated on her. By this time, he had married six other women and taken many concubines. It can be hard to worship when you have been hurt.

It matters, husbands, that we resist sexual immorality and honor our wives in marriage. It matters that we honor marriage as a church: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). David selfishly pursued his own desires. Michal's prayers were hindered. Her marriage with David blocked her relationship with God. Maybe you have suffered church hurt, bad leadership or spiritual trauma, or unfaithfulness. I know people who walked away from the faith; they couldn't get past the sin of a fallen leader or Christian “ex.” That pain is real. Still, I want to say, don't let it keep you from God. Don't let an unfaithful man keep you from a faithful God. Don't let past hurt rob you of future joy. Don't get stuck in unforgiveness. God is higher than

human failures. Anyway, Michal was stuck in the window. She couldn't focus on God; her heart was wrapped up in pain, and we can give her a little more grace this morning.

What next? More offerings! "They brought the ark of God and set it inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and they presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before God. After David had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each Israelite man and woman" (1 Chronicles 16:1-3). This is the inauguration of donuts in church to the glory of God! What a waste! What a waste. This is all at huge expense. The sacrifices are for atonement, but did you know? The people ate the meat. The priests burned some, kept some, and the rest of it they butchered and barbecued for the people. The poor tasted meat among the people of God. Do you know how rare that is? Medium rare. No, extremely rare. No ancient culture, no present culture, do the poor eat meat. But this is God's table. This is God's house. Every man, every woman, a cake of raisins, a cake of dates, a loaf of bread, the poor taste meat—the feast is on.

"He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to extol, thank, and praise the Lord, the God of Israel" (1 Chronicles 16:4). David put a permanent worship staff in place. This is the institution of continuous and regular worship in the house of the Lord. No longer were musicians just for special occasions. The people of God met with song and celebration to make much of God who is worthy of celebration day after day, week after week. David himself was a musician. Half the Psalms are praise

songs David wrote in the Spirit to draw the people of God into genuine worship and passionate praise to the One who is worthy of celebration. God is worthy of celebration.

"I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes" (2 Samuel 6:22). That's what David famously said to Michal when she chastised him. No matter what you make of me, I will make much of God. We all need to get there. No matter what the world makes of you, make much of Jesus. Make much of God who is worthy of celebration.

But, in the words of Charles Spurgeon, "We would see Jesus." Where is Jesus? David stripped and danced undignified. Jesus was stripped bare and shamed. David spent his dignity to the glory of God. Jesus gave away His dignity when He died for us. He was arrested and beaten and marched through the streets half naked. David and the priests walked over the blood of rams and bulls. Jesus covered the same streets in His own blood shed for us. The blood of animals could not pay for sins, but only cover them over. Jesus died to pay. We would see Jesus. Jesus was pinned to the cross without dignity, so that you and I could dance free. Jesus gave His life away as an atoning sacrifice, for sinners slain, so that you and I could come to the table of the Lord as children and heirs. David set the table of the Lord when the ark came to Jerusalem—come, one and all, and eat, taste, be full! Jesus said, "This is my body, broken for you. Take. Eat." Come to the table Christ has made possible. He is worthy of celebration.