

## Worship, Our Eternal Vocation: David Danced II Samuel 6:12-23

### Introduction – Review

Most folks know that the last thirty years have brought a good deal of tension in the worship arena for non-liturgical evangelical churches. My calling in ministry has put me right in the middle of those controversies during that time.



"Okay, the only fair way to do it this morning is . . .  
heads it's the hymnal, tails it's choruses."

While the so-called “worship wars” are subsiding now for a number of reasons, it would be unfortunate if we as a church did not learn and benefit from the season of trial that the larger church has experienced. Though there no doubt have been bad actors on both sides of traditional and contemporary debates, I believe with all my heart that the tension has forced us to delve much more deeply into the meaning and practice of biblical worship than if we had never faced controversy. That is why, for the last five weeks, we have been engaged in a sermon series on worship.

In the first message, we affirmed that God made us in his image to be worshippers. Worshipping God is the continual outpouring of our soul toward him. In that sense, we can live a life of “unceasing worship.” That is the “sweet-spot” of life where we will find “fullness of

joy” in his presence (Psalm 16:11). In our second message, we unpacked the essence of Old Testament worship and discovered that the purpose of our corporate gathering on Sunday morning was to engage with God. Ultimately, we engage with God in corporate worship by “doing his Story” together. Our consideration of worship in the New Testament focused on the idea of worshipping “in spirit and in truth.” Truth, we were reminded, resides ultimately in Jesus Christ; he is our only access to God the Father. We were also confronted with God’s demand that we come to him honestly and with an open heart in order to worship him truly “in spirit.”

Our fourth message focused on the richness of hymns. As our musical culture progresses more into a popular style, there is a great danger that we might miss the very significant contributions of centuries of hymnody. I doubt that will happen. The body of Christian hymnody has withstood the test of a long span of time. Still, it is essential that we intentionally retain the best in our hymn heritage because they are very effective in teaching the faith and they keep us connected to those who have gone before us. Finally, last week we were challenged to emotionally engage with God through the gift of contemporary praise and worship songs.

Frankly, it was one of the most risky things I have done in ministry – to challenge us – a very reserved congregation – to give ourselves to the moment and emotionally engage through music, which for a good number of us, is not our natural preferred style. As far as I know, the deacons haven’t convened any secret meetings to discuss the disposition of the lead pastor’s continued employment at the church. I’m grateful for your receptivity. And though I joke lightly about it, I encourage you to take the messages that I’ve brought to you quite seriously. I am passionate about worship renewal because I believe it is an effective pathway to the change and growth that is essential if the church is to thrive in this and the next generation. If you would like to have all the messages together to review and reflect upon, we’ll publish and bind them for a nominal cost to cover expenses. The booklet would include all the worship messages, including next week’s as well as an annotated list of books on worship that you might find helpful. If you’re interested, just note that on a yellow card and give it to me or leave it on your seat when you leave.

This week, I beg your indulgence one more time as I press you in the area of physical expression in worship. If last week was challenging, this week pushes in just a bit deeper. I’m not apologetic; I’m sympathetic. I know this is challenging. But I believe with all my heart that God has been speaking to the church through the worship awakening of the last generation. We need to be wise and discerning and consider what the Spirit of God is saying to us in this time, in

this place. Let me make that personal. You need to be wise and discerning and consider what the Spirit of God is saying to you through this series on worship and what changes you may need to undertake. After all, throughout this series, we have maintained that we need to be biblical learners who are servants of one another. Here then, is this morning's text:

**Text – II Samuel 6:12-23**

(Set context...read with commentary)

And it was told King David, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. And when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. And David danced before the Lord with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

As 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. And they brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed, each to his house.

And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" And David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord—and I will celebrate before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

## Prayer

### David's Actions Explained and Motivations Explored

As is typical of narratives about David, this story is full of drama. And in this case, his actions in the story require a bit of explanation for us in the modern non-Jewish world. Dancing in the Scriptures was always an act of celebration. In the Bible, there is nothing that would compare with ballroom dancing or certainly what goes on in a night club. There were no sexual connotations at all, so the squeamishness that we evangelicals have typically felt about dancing really doesn't apply in this situation. Most likely, David was not doing a solo dance, but was leading the congregation in their celebration much like Jewish folk dances that you might have seen such as the well-known "Hora." The specific Hebrew word used in our text means "whirling." You can easily picture how someone might throw themselves into such a dance and do it with all their might, as the story describes David.

His "linen ephod" merits some comment. I have heard people say that David "danced naked before the Lord." Honestly, his life has enough drama to it without introducing that kind of lurid detail. I know that some commentators have said that his "linen ephod" was nothing more than a loin-cloth that may have inadvertently exposed him. Michal's reaction and assertion that he "exposed himself before the servant girls" is employed as evidence that David was scantily dressed. But I don't think it is necessarily the case. The parallel passage telling the story from a more corporate perspective in I Chronicles 15 describes David as clothed with a robe of fine linen as well as a linen ephod – typical of the Levites and priests who served in the Hebrew worship system. What David did in this story, pre-figures what Jesus would later do: he laid aside his kingly garments in order to become a servant. (Philippians 2:6-7: "...though he was in the form of God...emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.) And that, of course, is what infuriated his wife.

*What would motivate David to do such a drastic thing?*

Even from his youth, David was obsessed with the glory of God. When the armies of Israel cowered before the giant, Goliath, David the shepherd boy was incensed because God's name was besmirched. . Outmatched in every sense, he faced his foe with these words,

You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.

Throughout his life, David had faced fierce enemies and God had delivered him out of the hand of them all. David was a champion for God's glory! Finally, on this day, when he is able to bring the Ark – the symbol of God's presence and glory – into his capitol city, there is no restraining him. The fire that burns within his soul overflows into exuberant and unrestrained rejoicing. David dancing before the Lord is as natural as a grandmother's hug.

### **Lessons for Modern Dignified Worshippers**

King David's motivations and actions on that memorable day have profound implications for us. After all we've experienced and known through Jesus Christ, should we not be like David, champions for God's glory? Is our salvation any less than David's deliverance from his enemies and his elevation to the throne of Israel? What is it, then, that keeps us from exuberant celebration like David?

I believe there are two things that are unjustified; nevertheless, they hold us back.

First, unknowingly, we have become modern Gnostics, equating things in the physical realm as inherently bad – or at least inferior to the spiritual realm. Hear me. Believing that our bodies have nothing to do with spiritual life is a heresy that is as old as the New Testament. Christ affirmed our bodies by taking one on himself. Our bodies are integral to who we are. They should play a vital role in our worship and our relationship to God. What does the Apostle Paul tell us to do? “Present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God” (Romans 12:1). We should use our bodies in worshipping God. Do not discount your body; it has been redeemed as well as your soul. When your body finally fails in death, it will be raised up and resurrected on the Last Day. This is central to the meaning of the gospel. No. Do not disdain your body; offer it in worship to God.

Second, and probably most importantly, stop worshipping your own dignity. Lay that, too, on the altar of worship before the Lord. Jack Hayford, one of the most effective speakers in the Promise Keepers Movement twenty years ago, tells of his own wrestling with the issue of his dignity and expressive worship. While praying in the sanctuary of his church, he heard the Spirit of God speaking to him, “dance for me.” He was horrified. What if someone walked in on him while he was doing some sort of awkward jig? He wrestled with the demand, but it persisted. “Dance for me.” He thought he could ignore it. He went through all the normal excuses we offer:

- Well, some people just *need* a lot of exuberance. Others of us don’t.” (The implication being that *mature* people don’t.)
- “It’s all a matter of a person’s cultural background. You and I are culturally reserved.” (The implication being that being *reserved* is more culturally advanced.)
- “You must watch out for emotionalism; it becomes *so* subjective and worship loses its objectivity in worshipping God and starts to center on man.” (The theological concern for “God’s glory” obviously makes this righteously unchallengeable.)
- “I believe – don’t you? – that everyone should worship God in his own way, and according to his own beliefs. After all, to do otherwise is...well, it’s...it’s un-civil.” (You know, each of us should us should worship God according to the dictates of his own heart.)
- (Smiling smugly) “I wouldn’t let it worry me. After all, what difference can it make? God looks on the heart, anyway. All this activity doesn’t add a thing!”<sup>1</sup>

Hayford had all the arguments to keep his feet still, but he knew that to refuse the Voice would eventually lead to a “calcification of the bones in his soul leading to spiritual arthritis.” So he danced.

Both the Old and New Testaments affirm physical expressions in worship, whether it be singing, clapping, lifting of hands, or dancing. One of the primary words that is translated as “worship” - *prokuneo* – is a word depicting physical action. There is no question. Physical expression should be part of our worship practice. The nagging reservation of physical expression in worship is the loss of dignity before people – plain and simple. Worship has

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Hayford, *Worship His Majesty*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), p. 128.

always demanded sacrifice. The uncomfortable question before you and me is whether or not you and I are willing to sacrifice our dignity for the glory of God.

### **Getting Real**

Unsettling, isn't it? I'm preaching and it makes me squirm. So let's be honest and open together about these things.

### *Singing*

Singing is a physical expression in Scripture which is expected of all God's people both in the psalms and in the New Testament. We've already spoken at length about singing – and I'm certain I'll continue to raise the topic.

### *Clapping hands*

We are a congregation that is comfortable with clapping hands – a physical expression that is encouraged in worship. “Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!” (Psalm 47:1) Clapping is such a happy sound; I would never want to discourage it in worship. It is, in a sense, our cultural way of saying “amen.” But I know there are some folks who are uncomfortable with the practice, and for good reason. Clapping, in our culture is generally understood as applause – expressing appreciation or honor to someone. Here is where we need to be discerning. In worship, all our honor and applause should be directed to God. There are times in our worship when we are moved by the greatness of God through a song that has been sung or a statement that has been made where loud applause would be very appropriate. We are applauding God – and that is a wonderful expression of worship. Some folks call that a “clap-offering.”

The problem arises when we use applause as a “rating system” for the quality of performance by our musicians – especially in special music. I'm not going to prohibit it. And oftentimes, I know that your applause is in appreciation for person who has just offered their musical gifts to God in worship. I think that is OK. But be discerning. Let us never use applause as a rating system for quality. And, let me add, it is quite alright not to applaud as well. There are times when a musical presentation is too profound and leaves us contemplating. At that point, silence is the absolute best response.

In the end, I believe clapping in worship is a good thing. Just be discerning.

### *Kneeling*

We are not a liturgical church in the way that Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians are. In a profound way, we have lost something very significant because those traditions, through more formal, tend to be more physical in their worship. I was raised Baptist. Been a Baptist all my life and I have no intention of changing. But I lament the absence of kneelers on our pews.

There is tremendous humbling power in the physical act of kneeling. You may not feel like praying. But humble your body by getting on your knees and your heart will quickly fall in line. We need more kneeling together in prayer. It's a challenge with the closeness of our pews, but there may be times when we can and should kneel together in this place. Small groups, Sunday School classes, prayer meetings and especially deacon meetings would do well to incorporate the practice of kneeling together in prayer. It is a great leveling, as we humble ourselves together before God.

### *Dancing*

If you weren't, you should have been here last week for VBS. They were actually dancing in the sanctuary – in our Baptist church! It was such a joyous experience as the children celebrated the Lord. As soon as children can walk, they start dancing when they are happy. Why did we ever stop? I can tell you, they never did in Africa. And if African worship is anything, it is joyous! ...even in the midst of oppressive poverty. Dance has been the subject of our text this morning so I don't need to say anymore. I don't see it becoming a hallmark of our corporate worship here. But let me say this: if your feet feel like moving – move them. And let the rest of us refrain from judgmental disdain on those who move a bit in worship.

### *Lifting hands*

Finally, I want to address the issue of lifting hands. It is biblically affirmed in both the Old and New Testaments as a posture for worship and prayer. The practice of lifting hands in worship has also been characteristic of the worship renewal of the last forty years. Its symbolism

is rich. Lifting our hands conveys both giving and receiving and it is the universal sign of surrender. Are not those actions important in our worship of God? Of course they are!

But lifting hands is not without controversy and the idea of it ignites no small amount of fear in a lot of people. Mostly, it is because lifting hands in worship is strongly associated with the Charismatic Movement. Friends, it's time to put that away for good. I've been lifting my hands in worship for over forty years and I have yet to speak in tongues! But I well remember my fears the first time I did it. I was really scared I was going to go down a path of religious fanaticism. I really thought I'd have to start speaking in tongues and fall on the ground and all kinds of strange things. But the glory of God was so clear and compelling to me and my heart overflowed with gratitude to him that I could no longer constrain myself. I took the risk and lifted my hands as we sang, "O come let us adore Him!"

What I discovered was a more intense level of engagement in worship. And since then, I have often found, like kneeling, if my body leads the way in expression that my heart will soon follow. Did I lose my dignity? Perhaps. Have I paid a price? Yes, I have. I started the practice in the early 70's when the Charismatic Movement was young and very controversial. In a couple of places, I was "blacklisted" and not given opportunities that I would have otherwise had because people were afraid I was Charismatic – all because I lifted my hands in public worship. And though I resonate on many points with Charismatics, I have never identified myself as one. The lifting of hands – which is strongly affirmed in Scripture and deeply symbolic – is not the sole possession of Charismatics. It's time to put away our fears and embrace this powerful biblical physical expression of worship for everyone.

(Let's do this together. Stand, if you are able. Now lift your hands up. In so doing, your symbolizing giving praise to God, receiving his blessing, or surrender to him. Look around. What do you see? You see a congregation engaged together. You can put your hands down and be seated. Physical expression in worship encourages others in their worship as they see you fully engaged. Your boldness will embolden them and encourage all of us.)

### *Practice in Private*

Now I know this is challenging for most of us. These are not practices that we normally engage in. But remember what we said about the postures we need to maintain. Physical expression in worship is biblical. We are also disciples – which means we are learners. Learners

are people who change and that is a challenge that is before most of us this morning. I encourage you to take a risk and be physically expressive in your worship. But if that is too much for you at this point, let me encourage you to begin to use physical expressions – kneeling and lifting your hands – in your private worship. I know that you will find it to be very beneficial. I guarantee it! And when you have found the benefit privately, bring it to corporate worship where we can encourage one another.

### **A Sober Warning**

There is one more aspect to this story that is deeply sobering. David's wife, Michal, took him to task for his public expression of worship. There is much to develop in their interchange which I cannot do because I have already spent my time. But the outcome for Michal's resistance to humble physical expression was a lifetime of barrenness. I don't want to spiritualize this too much. But there is a deeper dimension of worship engagement that you will experience when you begin to express your worship with your body. I speak from my own life and those who worship physically will testify to the same truth. As your pastor, I lovingly encourage you to risk losing some of your dignity and physically express your worship to God in public. In the same way, I want to guide you away from resistance to this idea. I covet for you, a fruitful worship experience rather than one that is barren. Obedience to the Spirit's promptings in expressing your worship will bless you and others in countless ways.

Risk it. You will never regret it.

### **Prayer**

### **Closing Song – O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing**

(Set the context with the undignified style of Charles and John Wesley)