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## ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP 2 SAMUEL 6:1-10

### INTRODUCTION

This is the kind of sermon that probably needs to be preached every couple of years or so. Our topic today concerns the corporate gatherings of worship which we hold here at Green Run Baptist Church each week. I think it is important that we all understand the significance of this gathering and we also need to understand why we do what we do when we get here. To turn our minds toward this subject, let me make a few statements: (1) God accepts some worship and rejects others (Isaiah 1:1-20). (2) God requires corporate, public worship (Hebrews 10:23-25). (3) This means that the church is responsible for ensuring that each corporate gathering is ordered so that it pleases the Lord. This means that we must be careful how we handle the holy things of God, especially when we are gathered together on the Lord's Day and in His name.

### 1. DAVID'S CARELESSNESS IN HANDLING HOLY THINGS (2 SAMUEL 6:1-10)

Under the Old Covenant, God gave specific commands concerning how His people were to worship Him. We have learned that in the Old Testament, the coming Christ is seen in many types. For instance, the Ark of the Covenant symbolized the presence of God among His people. The ark was a sacred container and it held the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments. God gave clear instructions of how the ark was to be handled (Exodus 25:10-22; Numbers 4:5-6; 15).

Now we move forward in Israel's history and David is the king. The ark had been largely forgotten and neglected for some time. Now that David is established as king, he desired to bring the ark back to Jerusalem to symbolize the presence of Israel's true King. There is no doubt that David was excited about this opportunity and he set out to accomplish the task. David gathered 30,000 men to observe this event, but he neglected to follow the Lord's revealed instructions. Instead of the ark being properly covered and carried, it was placed on a cart pulled by oxen. As the oxen pulled the cart, one of the oxen stumbled and nearly caused the ark to fall. Uzzah reached out to steady the ark and when he touched it he broke the clear command of God. In response to Uzzah's disobedience, God killed him.

There is no reason to doubt both David and Uzzah's sincerity and love for God. But their good intentions do not equal obedience to God's revealed will. God killed Uzzah for his irreverence, not his insincerity. It is possible to be sincere and irreverent at the same time and much that poses for worship gathering today may fall under this category.

As we read this account, most of us probably begin to think that God was out of line. David himself struggled with his own emotions as he observed this event. David should have immediately humbled himself, but instead, he became angry. His anger then turned to a kind of fear or dread of God. When we learn that God cares how we worship Him, we should not become angry or dread His presence; we should humble ourselves and seek to know what He requires of us.

## 2. THE NECESSARY ELEMENTS OF A NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP GATHERING

Under the New Covenant the church has much more freedom to structure her worship gatherings. To put it another way, there is no book of Leviticus in the New Testament. But we must not become careless as we handle the holy things of God. Edmund Clowney wrote, *Few consciences would be violated by anything that happens in a church service. People think of the church as offering religious platform presentations: a pageant of some sort, or a speaker offering professional opinions on such things as stress reduction and family values...In the New Covenant, we must not forget the lessons of the Old. God invites worship on His terms, not ours.*

First of all, let's understand why we are free from Old Covenant stipulations concerning worship. The many symbols of the Old Testament associated with worship were all given to foreshadow Christ. So the formal stipulations reminded Israel that coming into the presence of God was serious business. The holy places, holy symbols and holy actions were all given to signify God's holiness and man's need of a mediator to enter into the presence of God. When Christ came as our anointed High Priest, He opened access to God so that we need not return to such ceremonies, places and actions which mediated the presence of God. We no longer need a human priesthood, animal sacrifices, the temple or the Ark of the Covenant.

Secondly, let's focus on the New Covenant elements of worship which should characterize every true church. What do we need in order to experience the presence of God when we gather as His people? Some may be tempted to say that we need nothing, but that kind of thinking fails to recognize that God works through means. So what are these means which must be a part of our worship?

### (2.1) Direct communication and explanation of God's Word

In the Old Testament, God often communicated through images (temple, Ark of the Covenant, priestly garments, etc.). In the Gospels, God communicated through His living Word, Jesus Christ. In this day, God primarily communicates through the written Word, the Bible. Therefore, Paul commands Timothy to *give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching (1 Timothy 4:13).*

We cannot replace preaching-teaching with any other form of instructing the people of God. Technology has its place, but God has ordained preaching to teach and inspire His people toward a life of true worship. Here at Green Run, we are dedicated to saturating our corporate gatherings with Scripture. We have responsive readings. While I preach through a New Testament book, we publicly read through an Old Testament book in our preparation time. The explanation of God's Word is usually the lengthiest part of our gathering and that is intentional.

This focus on Scripture has led me to describe our church as an evangelical and reformed Baptist church. We are evangelical because we believe that every person is a sinner, dead in trespasses and sins, in need of a Savior. We believe that every individual must be born again, granted repentance and faith, so that he will turn to Jesus for salvation. We are reformed in the sense that we believe that if God does not initiate that work, the sinner will continue to forever find more pleasure in sin than in God and he will never turn to God in lasting repentance and faith. In other words, we believe salvation is of the Lord as Jonah said. Finally, we are Baptists because we believe that only professing believers should be baptized.

## **(2.2) Prayer**

By my focusing on preaching, you may get the idea that the only thing God requires of you is to listen, but that is not the case. In every corporate gathering, you are to pray fervently for the blessing of God. The congregation must participate in this service through its hearing and its praying. Prayer will take many forms in worship. Confession of sin is the first kind of prayer that we participate in as a local congregation. But we must also intercede for one another and we must give thanks to God in prayer. Finally, we must not be afraid to ask God for what we need to do His will. So confession, intercession, thanksgiving and supplication are central to New Covenant worship. Jesus said, Is it not written, ' MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS' (Mark 11:17)?

## **(2.3) Singing**

God knows that our joy is made complete when we are able to celebrate what we love. When we discover some joy, we naturally want to speak of it and praise it. This is true if we are talking about our favorite food, sports team or movie. Our joy is made fuller by praising this thing to others. The same is true of our relationship to God. When we contemplate His great acts of mercy toward us, our joy is made fuller and His glory is made known through our praising Him along with others. This is why singing will always be a key component to our worship. Singing is our unified opportunity to pray, praise God, exhort one another and proclaim the Gospel.

## **(2.4) Sacraments**

In this age of individual expression, it probably needs to be said that we cannot walk in obedience to Christ if we neglect the Lord's Table. Someone may say, "I can remember Jesus anytime and anywhere. Why must I come to the Lord's Table with other believers to do this?" The clearest response is that we must observe the Lord's Table because He has commanded that we do this. We are not free to choose how we will worship Jesus. Jesus has commanded us to observe this sacrament on a continual basis. He has commanded us to worship Him through eating and drinking as we call to mind who He is and what He has done. Another answer to our hypothetical question is that we do more than remember Jesus when we gather at the Lord's Table.

## **CONCLUSION**

We need to be careful how we handle these holy things. There is much freedom to structure corporate gatherings in a way that honors God, but care is still required. So follow this good advice from the puritans, *Prepare to meet thy God, O Christian! Betake thyself to thy chamber on the Saturday night, confess and bewail thine unfaithfulness under the ordinances of God; ashamed and condemn thyself for thy sins, entreat God to prepare thy heart for, and assist it in, thy religious performances; spend some time in consideration of the infinite majesty, holiness, jealousy, and goodness, of that God, with whom thou art to have to do in sacred duties; ponder the weight and importance of his holy ordinances...; meditate on the shortness of the time thou hast to enjoy Sabbaths in; and continue musing...till the fire burneth; thou canst not think the good thou mayest gain by such forethoughts, how pleasant and profitable a Lord's day would be to thee after such a preparation. The oven of thine heart thus baked in, as it were overnight, would be easily heated the next morning; the fire so well raked up when thou wentest to bed, would be the sooner kindled when thou shouldst rise. If thou wouldst thus leave thy heart with God on the Saturday night, thou shouldst find it with him in the Lord's Day morning.*