

2 Samuel 6

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[0 : 0 0] I want to begin this evening by reinforcing the importance of trying to understand the Old Testament. The reason I say that is because for many Christians, the Old Testament is a neglected book. They say, well, do you really need the Old Testament? I mean, surely what we need is Jesus.

Jesus' life, Jesus' death, His resurrection. We need the teaching of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. All these things we find in the New Testament, and the gospel is made clear for us there. What more is there in the Old Testament? We need the New Testament. We need to lay hold on the teachings of Paul in order to know how to live. And sure, all of that is true, but we do need the Old Testament to reinforce our understanding, the fullness of our understanding of why Jesus died.

Paul put it like this. He said, for I delivered to you as of first importance the gospel, which is that Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures. Now, what he means by that is, if you really want to know, if you're eager, and I hope we all are eager to know why Jesus died, what happened on the cross, then the Old Testament is the place to go because it shows us how it was necessary to sacrifice. God demanded sacrifice as the payment for sin. God, in the Old Testament, He showed how one day His servant would appear and become the suffering servant, and through His suffering there would be release and deliverance from sin. So, if you really want to know and have a proper understanding, a mature understanding of Jesus and the gospel and His death and resurrection, you have to get to know the Old Testament. I'm not saying you can't be a Christian without knowing anything about the Old Testament. I'm sure you can. But as a Christian, you will want to grow in your knowledge. You'll have to have better understanding. This came home to me very recently during Star Wars. Bear with me. I have a son, I have a grandson who is a Star Wars fanatic.

And every time Star Wars comes out, usually around about Christmas, then I get a phone call because his dad's not that interested in it. So, he phones me because I'm the soft touch.

And so, we go to the cinema. And for the last three years, I've had to sit through Star Wars, three hours worth each shot, Star Wars, and try to make out what is happening. Now, at my age, it takes me a lot longer to work out what is happening in any movie, let alone Star Wars. So, I'm sitting with him, the third Star Wars movie, and I'm still trying to work out who is who, and who the good guys are. The point is this, that after about half an hour, if you know nothing about Star Wars, you can just about make out who the good guys are and who the bad guys are.

[3 : 1 9] Even if you don't know anything about them, you don't know their names. All right? So, I'm whispering to Samuel, who's that guy there? You know what happens then? Out comes the book, the notebook. That's how fanatic he is about Star Wars. And in the notebook are all the characters, and the history, and who does what, and who belongs to who, and so on and so forth. And he then, it must be dead annoying for the people behind us, because there's this conversation going on, and he's telling me, he's explaining to me the background, what's happened in the past.

That's what the Old Testament does. The Old Testament is the notebook that you really, it's, of course you can be a Christian just with the New Testament, but the Old Testament is the way to really understand the gospel in the light of the whole Bible, not just in the light of the New Testament, but the light of the New. And that's why I go back time and again to the Old Testament, and I would encourage you to do the same. Now, this, it was a momentous occasion. I don't know if you shut your eyes when I was reading this, and imagine, often you have to do that, you have to imagine what's going on as you're reading a chapter like this. I don't know if you've ever had this experience. You're maybe on holiday. I remember this happened to us many, many years ago on one of these very few special family holidays. We had three of our kids, I think, with us, and we went to Paris, and we're wandering around. We'd never been there before, and early evening, we're wandering around the streets of Paris, and we became aware that a lot of people were walking in the one direction.

All right? So, obviously, a crowd was gathering, and your natural instinct is two things. First of all, you want to know what's happening, but secondly, you want to be part of it. So, we did. We followed the crowd. We had no idea what was happening, but we followed the crowd. Eventually, more and more people joined us, and we eventually found our way of being herded into this park where there was a marvelous fireworks display. Unbeknown to us, it was the 14th of July, which is Bastille Day, one of the most important days that there is in France. We had no idea. I'm hopelessly ignorant of French history, but this was a momentous occasion. This is a momentous occasion. I hope that we feel the same as we read this. A, we want to know what's going on, and we want to be part of it. This is not just a few people gathering. This is thousands of people. There are tens of thousands. I think the number is 30,000 people gathering in this little town, and they are there for a reason, and your natural inclination is to say, well, what is the reason? Is this a royal occasion? Well, it is a royal occasion because David is part of this. David's at the heart of this gathering. So, it's a royal occasion. You're asking, is it a wedding? No, it's not a wedding. It becomes very clear that it's not a wedding. Well, what is it then? Everything revolves around the ark, the ark, and the more you read a chapter like this, the more you become intrigued by it. You say, well, the more questions arise in your mind. Well, what was the significance of this ark? And as you go through the chapter, you realize that this is not just an occasion, but it's a procession. They're taking the ark from one location, and they are bringing it into another location, and this is not something that's done in secret. It's something that's done openly. It's a tremendous national celebration that involves thousands of people. So, naturally, you want to ask, well, what is the significance of this ark? What is it? What are we talking about?

When we know about Noah's ark, but obviously, this is something different. This is a different ark, and I hope that that's the kind of question that is generated in our minds as we read a chapter like this.

So, I want us to look at three things about this chapter, about this procession. I want us to look at, first of all, the difference between Saul's reign and David's reign. We're going to go back and to see the difference. I want us to look also at the difference between David's anger at God, which we're right about, and his rejoicing in God. And I want us to look at the difference between truly worshiping and merely spectating. Three things, three things that I think this chapter brings out.

[8 : 22] First of all, I want us to look at the difference between Saul's reign and David's reign, and you can summarize the difference. Now, Saul was David's predecessor. He had just recently died. He was the first king of Israel, and he was something for all his potential. He was something of a failure in God's eyes.

So, he had died recently, and therefore, David was his replacement. But here is the difference between Saul's reign and David's reign. The difference is summed up in how they approached this ark.

For Saul, the ark wasn't essential. Saul was content to leave the ark in the house of Abinadab, because it meant little or nothing to him. Whereas David, on the other hand, had a completely different approach. For him, the ark meant everything. So, you get one king, the first king of Israel, for whom the ark means nothing, and you get the second king of Israel, David, for whom the ark means everything. So much so that he makes it a national occasion where he wants to move the ark from where it's located into Jerusalem, where he wants it to be at the very heart of the believing covenant community. So, what was it about this ark? What did it look like? What was it? Why was it so special? Well, let's just take five minutes reminding ourselves of what the ark was. It was a box. It was a box that was no more than the size of an ottoman. You know, an ottoman is. It's a chest. It's kind of like probably a bit smaller than this table. And I grew up with an ottoman in my bedroom where all my clothes were kept. It was like a wooden box where everything was just thrown into it. There was a lid on it. Well, the ark was something like that, except that it didn't have everything thrown into it. It was a very special box, and it was made in a special way. If you want to know what it looked like, you have to go back to Exodus, where it's described in great detail. It was built out of special wood, and it was overlaid with gold.

By the way, if you quantify the amount of gold that's used, it was an incredibly expensive box. But that's beside the point. The most important part of the box was not actually the box itself. It was the lid, the top, which was fashioned out of pure gold. And it was in the shape of two cherubim, or two angels, that were carved out. It was fashioned out of gold. So the two angels, their wings stretched over the box, touching each other, and their faces were kind of diagonally looking down.

And this box, this ark, was called the Ark of the Covenant, and it was placed in the most sacred location in God's place of worship in the Old Testament, which was the tabernacle, a place that was forbidden out of bounds to anyone at any time except the high priest once a year.

[11 : 41] And it was, this was the location where literally, and here's the point, God came to sit. It was called the throne of God. Now, God, of course, is not located anywhere. God is everywhere. He's omnipresent.

And yet, in a strange, inexplicable way, God chose to locate himself in the middle of his people, at the very heart of his people, Israel, in this precise location upon his throne, which was the Ark of the Covenant. So the Ark of the Covenant was identified with a presence, with a holy presence of God. That's what made it so important and so sacred. And so by making the effort to publicly gather all the people to where the Ark was placed and lifting it from where it was placed and bringing it all the way to Jerusalem, here's what David is saying. He's saying, I don't want God to be on the margins because that's what Saul did. Saul was content to have God on the margins, out of sight.

Whereas David said, I want God to be at the very heart of my reign, my kingship, my throne, my people. And what's important about my reign, says David, is not me, it's God. I want God to be the king.

There's a really important principle here, isn't there? Right away, there's something in this that speaks to all of us, I think. Where is God in our life? Is God on the margins? Have you neglected him in some way? Are you content to keep him at arm's length so that he's at a safe distance, so that he's no threat to you, and so that there's no awkwardness about him, and so that you can get on with your life the way you choose to do? If so, there is something deeply wrong with your life.

Or, have you done what David is doing, and taken God and located him at the very heart of everything that you are so that God takes the first place? What was it that Jesus said? Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and everything you need will be added to you.

[14 : 32] So, God demands my soul, my life, my all. That's what we sang this morning when I surveyed the wondrous cross. Demands my soul, my life, my all. Nothing less is service to God. Now, I'm not saying that we are perfect in our service to God. I'm certainly not, and I'm sure you're not as well.

But if we don't make that make a point of devoting ourselves 100% to God, then we're missing out, and we're shortchanging God, and we're keeping ourselves back from him. We're doing what Saul did.

And when you go down that road, then what happens is that we end up making all the wrong decisions because we're self-motivated instead of placing God at the heart of who we are. So, even in this, you might think, well, what does this chapter have to say to me? Right away, I think there's a message in it.

The difference between Saul's reign, are you a Saul or are you a David? I hope that all of us here are going to take what David is doing and apply it in our own hearts. And so, God, as far as David was concerned, God was present among his people. David had an acute awareness of that. David also knew that God was someone in whom he could rejoice. There is nothing, there is such a joy about this occasion. It's a solemn occasion, but it is an immensely joyful occasion. It is a celebration.

After all, what more is there to celebrate than the living God being amongst us? And there's a picture here of the church because that's what the church is. It is a community of believers in whom God dwells. It's the whole point of the day of Pentecost, when all the disciples were in one place and the Holy Spirit was poured out and he filled all of the disciples. And from then on, the church was to be the place that not only believed in God, but in whom God was present.

[16 : 57] Do we believe that? As we gather on a Sunday morning and on a Sunday evening, that God is present. He's here. He's amongst us. Well, David was so acutely aware of that, that he rejoiced. Nothing gave him such great joy as to know that God was amongst them as a people. He had promised to be his God and they were to be his people. But, and there's a but. And you know what's coming, don't you? Because we've read it.

The God who is amongst his people and the God in whom David rejoices is also a holy God. And you can't mess with a holy God. You can't tamper with a holy God. Because the next part of the chapter is the awkward bit, isn't it? We love to read about the rejoicing, but we know what's coming, don't we? Something dark, something scary, something that we don't really understand. Let's try and understand it. Because all of a sudden, amidst all the noise and the celebration, it all goes quiet.

And at the very heart of the celebration where the ark is, we find out why the silence. It's because one man has all of a sudden died. And his death is no accident. It's not that he's just at a heart attack. Or he's not, he hasn't died from natural causes. He's died because God has struck him down.

That's what we read. There's no easy way of explaining it. That's exactly what happened. And it tells us why God struck him down. It tells us that he made a big mistake, a fatal mistake.

He was one of the men who was responsible for transporting the ark. The ark was being pulled along. It was on a cart. And it was being pulled along by oxen. And one of the oxen stumbled. And there was a danger of the ark, obviously sliding off the cart. And Yuzah reached out and grabbed it to stop it from sliding. And that was the point at which we read that the anger of God was kindled against Yuzah. And he struck him down because he had touched the ark of God. Now, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, that's not fair. After all, Yuzah was a perfectly respectable individual. I mean, what did he do? Did he kill somebody? Did he deceive somebody? What did he do? Did he... What kind of...

[19 : 49] What kind of action warrants that kind of severe response from God? Is that all he did? He reached out and he touched the ark. And after all, he meant well in trying to keep it on the cart. Come on. I know that's what you're thinking. Because it's what I would naturally think as well.

It's a natural human response. And it's probably what made David so angry. David was angry with God. That's what we read. He was outraged. And I can understand him being outraged because his mind is probably going something like, I'm trying to put God at the heart of this community.

I'm trying to do the right thing here. I'm trying to honor God. I'm trying to restore all the wrongs that have been committed by my predecessor. And this is how he repays me. By killing one of my servants.

I mean, how are we going to encourage the Israelites to honor and obey and to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength if this is how he's going to repay our attempts?

And that is one way of looking at it. It's not the right way. But it is a natural way. It's a human way.

[21 : 23] Let's look at it, though, from another perspective. Let's look at it from the perspective that God had made it abundantly clear that no one, but no one, but no one was to ever, ever, ever, ever touch the Ark of the Covenant.

He had also, by the way, made it abundantly clear that the Ark was not to be carried on a cart pulled by oxen. That when the Ark was to be transported, it was to be carried by people on poles and only by the tribe of Levi, the priests.

All right? There were a full set of instructions as to how to handle the Ark of God. And God never left anything out, and the instructions were there for their own safety.

So, anyone who is breaking, who is violating these instructions, does so at their own risk.

Now, why did God give these instructions? Because He didn't want this kind of thing to happen. That's the last thing that God wanted, this kind of thing to happen.

[22 : 49] It's why we have health and safety all over the world that you and I live in. There's notices all over the place. Don't do this. Keep away from that.

Mind the gap. Don't come near. Why? Because if you do it, you're running the risk of death or injury. So, the notices are there for your safety.

They have to put any organization. I travel by train every day. And every time I travel by train, there's a notice. Please mind the gap as you're leaving the train.

And sometimes you think, why do they have to stay at every single station? Because there is a concern for the safety of passengers. And it was the same in God.

That's why He told them. In no uncertain terms, there was no mistake. When you're dealing with the ark, don't touch it.

[23 : 52] And for God to have shrugged His shoulder and say, well, that's okay. It would have been for God to contradict His own nature. And God doesn't do that.

He is consistent to His own nature. Why don't we tonight accept God the way He reveals Himself on His own terms and stop trying to make up our own terms and our own conditions as to how and when and why we're going to believe in Him?

Let's just read what He says and listen to what He says and know that God cannot be messed with. It's a bit like Moses. Remember the story of Moses when Moses, when he saw the burning bush.

Remember, he was intrigued by why the bush was burning and why the bush was on fire. And yet it wasn't being consumed. And so he went over to find out naturally. Same thing is happening, by the way.

It's exactly the same thing. And he's approaching the bush and God says to him, stop. Don't come any closer. Now imagine Moses said, I'm going to listen to that. I'm just going to go closer. I'm going to put my hand.

[25 : 00] He would have ended up the same way as you. Moses had the wisdom to listen and to step back. Because that's the first step in faith is to listen to what God is saying.

And to how he speaks to us. Because he is concerned for our own safety and for our own salvation. But what David discovered was that the same God who condemns, the God of holiness, and that's what we're dealing with here.

We're dealing with the God of holiness is the same God who blesses. Because the same ark that had been responsible for the death of Uzzah. Well, I shouldn't say there wasn't the ark that was responsible for Uzzah.

But you know what I mean. The same ark that had been the means of Uzzah's death actually became the means of the blessing of Obed-Edom. Because when David put it into the house of Obed-Edom and thought he could just walk away from the whole situation.

Then he discovered, hey, there's another side to this. God has blessed the house of Obed-Edom. And God is speaking to David and he's saying, don't wander away from me, David.

[26 : 14] I want to bless you. I am the God of grace, the God of kindness, the God of forgiveness. I want to be amongst you. Don't give up on me. Just because you've seen something of the fear of my holiness.

And so David thinks again. And he makes another decision. And this time he gets it right. This time he gets the priests to carry the ark properly according to the safety instructions that God has given.

And this time he is successful. And this time if he rejoiced in God before, he's rejoicing in God even more now. Do you know how this plays into the gospel?

Do you know how it relates to the gospel? It's like we were saying this morning about Jesus being a curse for us. In the New Testament we discover that whereas Uzzah suffered the anger of God because of his sinful behavior, Jesus suffered that same anger of God because he took our sin upon himself.

I know that this is quite similar to what we were saying this morning. Maybe there's a reason for that. But Jesus took our place so that we could be saved from God's wrath.

[27 : 37] And so that we like David could rejoice as we discover the greatness and the blessing and the kindness of God.

Time is gone. Let me just come on to the third and last point which is at the end of the chapter which shows us the difference, I believe, between truly worshiping God like David did.

Because if ever there's a chapter where worship is so evident, he's dancing before the Lord. And by the way, I'm not suggesting for a moment that that become part of our worship services just because David did it.

It's not a blueprint for the New Testament church. That was what he did at that moment in time. But what it does display to us, what it reinforces to us is the joy that David found in the Lord.

So he was able to rejoice boldly, even to the point of the expression of dancing before the Lord. So here is a moment, not just of celebration, but it's a moment of worship.

[28 : 43] David hasn't lost sight for a moment of the solemnity of what he's doing and the holiness of God. And it's almost like he's going to worship God even more because he's discovered the grace of God.

All right? And that's what we'll do as well. We may not understand everything about God. And I'm sure there's many things about this chapter we don't understand.

And yet, as we come face to face with the reality of the Lord, then we will want in faith to give him the glory even more because we have been saved from his condemnation.

Now, there's one person who isn't worshipping. And that person is probably, from one point of view, the closest person to David, his own wife.

Michal, or Micah, I don't know how you pronounce it. Michal, daughter of Saul. Chronicles tells us that she was watching all this from a safe distance in the first floor window.

[29 : 43] So David is right amongst all the people. And his wife is watching from a distance. She's spectating instead of being amongst the people.

And she's watching this and she hates what's going on. She despises what David is doing. She comes down and she gives this half-baked explanation of how he is acting so disrespectfully to himself.

How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today. Going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls and the servant girls as any vulgar fellow would. Clearly, there is an issue between David and his wife.

There is a major disagreement between what David is doing and what his wife thinks of what he is doing. And the reason for that is because simply they are not on the same page.

David has come to a personal knowledge of God himself. And Michal, sadly, has no knowledge of God. She has all the reasons.

[30 : 58] She has all the logic. And she is very critical. She seems to know exactly what David should be doing and what he shouldn't be doing. Isn't that amazing?

How some people, they seem to know exactly where you're going wrong as a Christian and yet they have never come to faith in Jesus themselves. Some of the most legalistic persons I have ever met in this life have been unbelievers.

I remember when I was in Stornoway on a Saturday once I was going down shopping, I think, in the street.

And I was wearing casual clothes. I was wearing, I don't know what it was, jeans or whatever. And this guy came up to me and he said, I knew your father.

And my father was a minister. And he was old school. He would go around everywhere with a dog collar on, with a minister's collar on, right? Because he was traditional. He was old school. He was a man of his day.

[31 : 56] All right, that's not a criticism. But this guy said to me, he said, I knew your father. And your father would never have dressed like that. I wasn't in the pool, but I wasn't in church.

I was in the middle of the main street. He says, Your father would never have dressed. And he was really angry. He was half drunk. Right?

So instead of realizing that there is a problem with me, I do not, my life is not right with God. I need to come to faith in Jesus Christ. He thinks he is in a position to talk about me dressed in casual clothes.

Some of the most legalistic people in the world are people who have no knowledge of Jesus. Personally. You can be the most, in one sense, the most religious person.

There's something deeply religious about what Michael is saying, isn't there? She's telling David off. This is not your place. You should be a king. You should be away from all these people. You should be dressed properly.

[33 : 01] You should be on your throne. You should be dignifying yourself in your palace. Instead of that, you're amongst all these commoners. And yet, her heart was so far away from God.

And that's a real tragedy. When people are so close and yet so far away. So seemingly religious who seem to know all the right language and yet they know nothing of the love of God in their own lives.

I want to ask you today. I want to ask you today. Tonight, are you a David who rejoices freely in God because of what he has done through Jesus Christ for you in redeeming you from your sin by his death on the cross?

Are you rejoicing in that this evening? Or are you a Michael who thinks they can spectate and criticize and comment?

Because in one sense, you can do all the right things on the outside and yet your heart is far away from God.

[34 : 12] I hope not. Oh, I really hope not. First thing we need to do tonight is to listen to God calling us, drawing us to faith in Jesus, to see our own failure, to see our own sin and our own need to come to forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

At root, David had something that she didn't. And I think that was what got to her. David had something that she didn't.

And I don't know all of you tonight. I don't know all of you. There may be someone here who isn't a Christian. I don't know if you're like Michael or not.

I really don't know. But you may realize in your own heart, these people have something that I don't.

And it may make you mad. It may make you so frustrated. All I have to say to you tonight is don't stay up there in the window. Come down.

[35 : 26] Come to Jesus. Ask him to change your life. Ask him to forgive your sin. Ask him to show himself to you.

And to transform you. And to transform you. So that your life is completely changed. And he'll do that.

And you will know what David knew. Which was God. As his savior. And as his lord. Our father in heaven. We thank you.

That you sent Jesus into the world. To bring us to you. By his death on the cross. And we ask that tonight. That you will. That you will speak to us.

Each one of us. Show us how to put God at the very heart of who we are. To be consistent. And show us. What faith in Jesus means. In a personal way.

[36 : 25] For we ask in Jesus name. Amen.