

2. For one of my classes, I have closely studied and teach 2 Sam. 6:12-23 (David dancing before the ark and his wife Michal chastising him for it) and its implications for worship.

I wanted to briefly (good luck with that) share what I have found because you mentioned this passage yesterday, because there are some very profound things in this passage that most evangelicals do not recognize, and because I think if they are applied, they have a profound impact on worship and worship leading.

I know you know the story, so I won't rehearse all of it, just point out some observations that lead to my conclusion, my conclusion, and the application.

The standard application of this story is that David was unashamed to make a fool of himself of worship, even to the point of exposing himself- so we should not be afraid to be expressive in worship. I don't have a problem with this application. I agree that many times we need to get over ourselves and give expression no matter who is watching. We should overcome our pride and be willing to look stupid for God's sake. However, I think there is a lot more going on in this story than just David's willingness to act in potentially embarrassing ways.

I'm assuming that we are on the same page as far as the conflict between David and his wife. He was right; she was wrong. This is clear because she was barren.

But what was she so ticked off about? She says (sarcastically) that David "distinguished" himself. She criticized him for "disrobing" in front of the servant girls as a "vulgar fellow".

Usually this is interpreted that she was embarrassed by him exposing himself. He "distinguished" himself by breaking normal conventions of modesty and decency about public nudity. He "disrobed" by not wearing sufficient clothes or moving in a way that his clothes did not sufficiently cover what needed to be covered. Therefore he is compared to a "vulgar" fellow- bringing up visions of a flasher in a trench coat publicly exposing himself. Some sort of indecent exposure is the typical explanation of the reason for her complaint, but I don't think it is the best explanation.

Please notice that for most of the books of Samuel, David is described simply as "David" (5:11, 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25; 6:1, 5, 8, 10 etc.). But in this passage, he is described as "KING David" (6:12, 16) and the "king of Israel" (6:20).

Likewise notice that his wife is not described as 'the wife of David' (as she is in I Sam. 19:11 when she is helping David), but as "Michal daughter of Saul" (6:16, 20, 23). I suggest (and will continue to argue below) that the conflict is really a continuation of the contrast between two styles of leadership: one characterized by David, and another characterized by Saul and now by Michal who is following in her father's pattern. This is almost as a climax to this major theme of Samuel- the contrast between the kind of King the people want- Saul, and the kind of King that God wants- David. And it leads very nicely into God's tremendous promises to David in ch. 7.

Notice the character of Saul which Michal is following:

In I Sam. 13, Saul is presumptuously offering sacrifices in a wrong way, and he is doing it for selfish benefit. "...the Philistines will come against ME..and I have not sought the Lord's favor. [so that the Lord will be on my side]" (13:12) Samuel tells him that "YOUR kingdom will not endure" (13:14). In 14:24, Saul wants to avenge himself on "MY enemies". Throughout I Sam., Saul is said to fight SAUL's enemies and SAUL's battles, and build SAUL's kingdom, but David fights the LORD's enemies and the LORD's battles. In other words, Saul used worship as a way for selfish gain and self promotion.

In I Sam. 15, there is a tremendous word play in Hebrew between the word which is translated both as "hear/listen" and "obey", and the word "voice". "LISTEN now to the VOICE of the word of the Lord" (v.1). After Saul claims to have carried out the Lord's instructions (v.13), Samuel asks "What is this VOICE of sheep in my ears, what is the VOICE of cattle that I HEAR?" (v. 14) And "why didn't you HEAR/OBEY the VOICE of the Lord?" (v. 19). Saul replied, "I did HEAR/OBEY the VOICE of the Lord." (v. 20) Then he used worship as an excuse for why he did not obey the command. Samuel responded that God does not delight in sacrifices "as much as in HEARING/OBEYING the VOICE of the Lord...To HEAR/OBEY is better than sacrifice." (v. 22) Then Saul admitted that he violated God's command and Samuel's instruction "because I feared the people and LISTENED to their VOICE." (v. 24).

At the end of this episode, Saul confesses his sin and asks Samuel to go back with him so that he can worship the Lord. But Saul's motive is revealed when Samuel refuses. Samuel tells Saul that God has rejected him and given the kingdom to another, etc. Saul does not seem to lament this but only asks that Samuel "...HONOR ME BEFORE THE ELDERS OF MY PEOPLE AND BEFORE ISRAEL; come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord." (v. 30). Saul was more attuned to the voice of the people than to the voice of God. Saul didn't care about losing favor before God as much as losing face before the people. Saul was more worried about plunder for himself than about obedience. Saul was more worried about his honor and status before the people than with God's opinion or decisions. Worship was used as a token of Saul's kingly status and reputation. Worship was used as a way for Saul to selfishly build and protect his own kingdom.

Notice the huge contrast with the way that David was behaving:

Some preliminary cultural observations:

The fact is that we don't know for sure what an "ephod" was, and how much of a person's body it covered (or didn't). It was a typical part of a priestly costume, and was never (to my knowledge) criticized as an inappropriate thing to wear.

We do know that distinguished people (especially kings and princes) were often distinguished by what they wore. (Would you recognize George W. Bush as the president if you had never seen a video or photo of him?) Joseph was given a special coat to signify his favored status. (Gen 37:3); Mordecai was given a "royal robe" (Est. 6:8, 8:15); We know that Herod wore a "royal robe" because it was put on Christ. (Lk. 23:11). And Jonathan- in a foreshadowing of this passage- gave his robe to David (I Sam. 18:4, see also 20:30-31, 42).

Back to Michal's complaint. I don't think the problem was with the ephod he was wearing. I think the problem was with the royal robe which he was not wearing.

This is what she meant when she criticized him for “disrobing”. And her sarcastic comment that he had “distinguished” himself comes from her desire that he be honored, that he display his kingly glory. And her complain that he was like any “vulgar” fellow doesn’t mean ‘vulgar’ in the sense of perverted or unclean, but ‘vulgar’ in the sense of a common person- “one of the rabble, one of the masses, a nobody” as opposed to one of kingly status. Her problem was that he had taken off the outward signs of kingship, power, status and authority and put on the costume of a common servant.

Now notice David’s response:

First, “It was before the Lord...I will celebrate before the Lord.” (v. 21) David rightly recognizes that David is not the most important person in the day’s procession. David’s worship is not about David, but about God. (How often our worship focuses more on ourselves than on God).

The Lord is described as “who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord’s people Israel.” (v. 21). The contrast between David and Saul is explicitly stated, with David being God’s choice. David was appointed over the LORD’s people, not over Saul’s people, or over David’s people. David did not say that ‘he appointed me KING’ but he said, ...”he appointed me RULER...”. A king is the top dog, with no one else in command over them. But David uses the Hebrew word *nagiyd* which usually refers to a prince, or official, or officer- someone who was in command, but not at the top of the chain of authority. It is the same word used in I Sam. 13:14- right after Saul had tried to use worship for selfish gain- Samuel told him that God has taken away Saul’s kingdom and “sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him LEADER of his people...” David recognized that he was not in charge, but only second in command. David is not King. The Lord is.

David says, “I will become even more UNDIGNIFIED than this” (v. 22). This word does not mean irrational or out of control. There is no warrant here for acting a fool, being silly or bombastic- these all draw attention to ourselves, the opposite of what this word means. It primarily means to be small, insignificant. He says, “I will be HUMILIATED in my own eyes. (v. 22). This word does not primarily mean embarrassed or ashamed, but would be best translated “I will be of little value/ of low standing in my own eyes.” That doesn’t mean that David thought he was a nobody, but it is still in contrast to the true King of Israel. Imagine yourself standing next to Tiger Woods and bragging about how good you are at golf. Imagine being in the same room with Bill Gates and talking about how much money you make. Now imagine David participating in the enthronement procession of the King of the Universe and showing off his own authority and power. Kind of stupid. But David also says that he will be held in honor by the slave girls. I am reminded of Jesus’ teaching that those who take the low place will be honored and those who are greatest will be the servant of all.

Bottom line- David did not celebrate himself as King, but the Lord as King. David was not worried about his own glory, fame, recognition, etc., but about the Lord’s recognition, fame, etc. There can only be one King and David knew it wasn’t him. David recognizes that the ark of God is coming into town, symbolizing the coronation of a King (see Psa 24). God is enthroned as the King over the whole earth-

David sees how inappropriate it would have been to dress up as king. There was only one King being enthroned that day and David was not it.

The point of the whole story is not about a willingness to look foolish- although that can be legitimate. The point is that God is King and we are not. How can we possibly be arrogant and self-centered, self-focused in worship? How dare we be concerned about our own tastes, preferences, feelings, reputations, etc. in God's presence? When we talk about 'what I got out of worship,' we totally miss the point. It is not about us.

I hope you are already way ahead of me as far as application. Proverbs 25:6 says "Do not exalt yourself in the King's presence." How much less should we manipulate to make ourselves look good in worship. I really appreciate that you want to use all the arts to reach people, but are wary of falling into gimmickry. Any art that draws attention to itself more than it draws attention to God cannot (in my opinion) really be considered worship.

Just to be perfectly clear- I am writing all of this because I am excited by what I have learned from this passage and wanted to share the wealth. I am not bringing this up because I'm complaining about Jubilee. If I had a major complaint, I would probably tell you strait out, not beat around the bush.

However, in the Western church, I believe we need to hear this. I deal with so many students who want to be worship leaders, but who don't yet get this. They secretly want to be rock stars. I struggle with it constantly. We have preachers and worship leaders who are indistinguishable from celebrities. But David's example should challenge us. Worship is not about me. I cannot be concerned with what people think of me, but rather of what people think about God and if God is pleased. It is impossible at the same time to convince people I am a great musician and to convince people that He is a great God. I either draw attention to myself or to Him. And it is not about me. The King is being enthroned in our presence, and I am not Him.

So 'dancing in my underwear' after David's example is not being afraid to express myself because of what others might think. Nor is it expressing myself to the point that others notice me. Rather it is forgetting myself and remembering and celebrating the real King. "True worship forgets itself in remembering God."- N.T. Wright.