

Sunday 15th November

Preparing for His Presence

David and God Prepared the People

Reading 1 Chron 13:1-4, 2 Sam 6:1-15

One of the most important things to happen in a community of believer's who desire the Presence of the Lord, is unity.

When I say Presence – I mean something completely different from ANOINTING which also requires unity. Psalm 133. Liberal anointing that makes a mess of the man, his clothes and where he stands. Anointing reveals Gods hand upon us. The anointing may change a person through hearing an anointed word, or a healing, or a deliverance, but a change of ones very being occurs when we come FACE to FACE with His Presence. You are anointed to function, to minister/serve God in the unique role and amongst the contacts you have. The flow of your anointing is determined by your functioning in your God given task. Isaiah 10:23 tells us that the yoke is broken by the anointing, and I am learning that in order not to become burdened with the situation, opposition, cares of the world, I need to function with the unction (anointing). I was reading Jeremiah 2:20-21 at the beginning of the week

Jer 2:20-21

"For of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds; And you said, 'I will not transgress,' When on every high hill and under every green tree You lay down, playing the harlot. Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine? NKJV

I got such encouragement from the positive statements in those verses – He has broken our yoke, i.e. He has anointed us, and we are a noble VINE, a seed of highest quality.

But then the warning, the sting in the tail, the place we often find ourselves, not living out what God has made us to be. Not functioning in the anointing, not bearing the fruit of the vine, not yielding a harvest. The words laying down, and playing the harlot to me spoke of sitting back, not doing what we are supposed to be doing, and entertaining thoughts contrary to Gods word.

We need to welcome His anointing, we must function under the unction, but let us go further and welcome His Face. Don't be like the Israelites who said to Moses you speak Face to Face with God and come and tell us what He says, let us pursue and practice His presence. We are called to **worship Him** not what He does.

David started the task of bringing back the ark of covenant, the manifestation of Gods presence at that time, by consulting with the people and agreeing to take 30000 leaders to Kirjath Jearim to bring back the ark.

After such a long period, possibly 100 years, of the ark not being the centre of Israels worship and service, this was no easy task. Most of the people will only have had the midrash stories told by their parents and ancestors of the significance of the presence of the Lord that this ark of covenant actually meant to the nation. Trying to reinstate something that is only a vague memory of a story in one individual is a difficult enough task but to get 30000 plus leaders to agree to go and collect a wooden box, was a tall order.

Can you imagine trying to persuade a Parliament to reverse some of the laws that go against Gods word, to recollect what it was like to live in a nation whose laws 100 years ago were primarily based on the Word. I trust this gives you hope that a people can be changed particularly when its about putting God back on centre stage, He is incredibly sensitive to hearts determined to bring Him back to the central focus. That was the size of the task that David faced, and he was not just dealing with a Parliament of 600 MPs but effectively with the head of every family and tribe.

How come David managed to do this, I believe because God was with Him and he was functioning under the anointing, but also because David himself had a deep passion for the Presence of God. In all his years of being the anointed king, but not inaugurated on the throne, he had been trained in obscurity to value the presence of God His protector. He started valuing the presence of God long before his anointing in the fields with His fathers sheep. He had learnt to worship God even though God appeared distant to His people who were oppressed by the Philistine. He learnt to worship God even though the kingdom was not united. He learnt to worship God even though Saul tried to annihilate him. He learnt to worship God when the wolves were howling around the sheep in the scary pitch dark. He learned to worship God when the lions and bears were prowling around the field, when he sensed them but could not see them. David's worship continued no matter the hardships and trials, God was God and His presence was drawn to selfless worship. David had learnt the reality through his years of preparation and now he wanted the whole of Israel to know that His Presence was more important than anything else.

You can only persuade a people to pursue His presence when you actually pursue Him in worship through every situation, no matter how good or how bad those situations are. Broken hearted worship comes from those who have become totally dependant and confident in God in every situation.

God also looks for repentant worship, that is worship that has yielded totally to God's way of living. David had learnt that whilst he was anointed as king he had no right to demand Saul's removal. He had no business even threatening the Lord's anointed predecessor. He submitted to the authority above him, that is God through Saul, until God removed Saul from the scene. David learnt that killing Goliath, and slaying 10,000's, even though it had won him favour with the people, favour with God and submission to his timing was more important. David was also to offer repentant worship after his son died and he had wept for seven days.

Its that type of prayer and worship that is resembled by the incense that Dick Reuben explained to us on the DVD. The broken, crushed, freewill offering coming from the depths of our being. The stacte, onycha, garbarnum, frankinsense and salt beaten together by the High Priest.

The apostles in the upper room had to learn to wait for the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Their dreams, hopes, vision devastated by the beating of their Master. Their hearts crushed by the horror of seeing Him on the cross. Their future determined to go the same route. Prior to this they had to repent of their vision of a Messiah who would deal with Roman oppression by force. They had had to repent from vying for position amongst themselves. They had to have broken in them the vision of worldly standards of victorious living. They has to repent of the attitude of being the superior race rather than the servants of the Almighty. They had to repent and yield to Jesus' ways of reaching out to the sinners and outcasts of society. Their whole lifestyle was one of repentant worship and service to the Kings way of doing things. Such repentant, changed attitudes, behaviours, lifestyles was an act of worship that welcomed Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

David's submissive lifestyle of worship to God's ways first, persuaded the people that pursuit of centralizing the Presence of God in the nation's lifestyle, was worth a united journey to go and collect a little heavy wooden box from Kirjath Jearim. It was worth pursuing an item that the stories of their ancestors would have told them was central to leading them through the wilderness, but also bought devastation to the Philistine's when they captured it.

This little wooden box was both to be welcomed, but also carried with it an element of suspicious fears as to what the consequence of bringing it back into the holy city might be. However, a king who practiced His Presence, led and persuaded others to pursue His Presence. David prepared the people with his story of his Divine Encounters with their God.

Look how this seasoned worshipper led the people in bringing back the ark

2 Sam 6:5

Then David and all the house of Israel played music before the Lord on all kinds of instruments of fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals. NKJV

That is some mobile orchestra. I wonder how much worship practice they had before starting the journey. We have no indication that they had learnt to play together before this event, I suspect it was a free style form of worship unlike any church service. ALL THE HOUSE played music, what an incredible statement, this speaks of a people prepared to work together in worship, and it is no easy task to play in harmony with such a large quantity of people whilst on the move.

Then disaster, or so it seemed, struck as Uzzah sought to steady the ark as the ox stumbled. What David was about to experience, and what the people he was leading would witness, was to be a repentant pause in his worship.

David became angry at the Lord
David was afraid of the Lord

When God allows difficult things in our lives for no apparent reason, or when He corrects, disciplines, or brings judgement for our failures to do things according to His pattern, the real test is whether we still worship, and whether we still go the distance. Before we worship again, we have to absorb the truth God is God, and He has the right to do what He wants to do. God is God, God is love, God is just, God is merciful and God is good no matter what we think about the circumstances and events that have just happened. However, it would be almost unnatural for anyone not to get angry with God for not doing what we think is right. It would also be unusual if we didn't say to ourselves at least "What is the point, God is just too powerful, too holy for me to be sure to get things right and avoid His wrath". To have a healthy fear of God is good, and to get angry is human, but we

must move on beyond those responses to a broken, repentant worship which invites God to take up His place on the mercy seat.

When we accept who He is, and accept who we are then we position ourselves to worship Him with a repentant submissive attitude. Your head may be messed up, but when you can get past what you want and go the distance for what He wants, then His mercy seat will be prepared.

David spent three months considering whether it was worth going the distance. During this time the 30,000 who were with him were probably getting back into their daily routines and wondering what was all that about. Can you imagine starting a new job, a new ministry, a new business with a group of other people and then after a few hours packing it all up because something went wrong. What would you be feeling about God? What would you be feeling about the person who convinced you to go this way or that? What would it be like eating humble pie and going back home and saying "We didn't complete the job, that leader was misguided?"

David may have momentarily given up on preparing and leading the people, but God did not stop. Notice what He does

2 Sam 6:11 *And the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and all his household. NKJV*

He displays to King David and all the people it would be a good thing for everyone to go the distance. Wherever the symbol of His Presence rested there would be incredible blessing. We read later that Obed Edom was so changed by the experience of having the ark in his house that from then on all he wanted to do was be wherever the ark was, even if that meant being just the door keeper of the house. Obed Edom met face to face with the Presence of God, responded to Gods leading and was consequentially blessed. The favour of God hovers around His Presence.

David now has potentially a difficult task, how do you get a disillusioned, disunited bunch of men to come together again and recommence the task you put down three months ago.

1 Chron 15 tells us that David gathers together probably the 30000 he originally took to Kirjath Jearim PLUS 970 or more Levitical priests to move the ark from Obed Edoms house to Jerusalem.

This time before He decides to move the ark again, he carefully uses his time of reflection on the Uzzah business to research what Gods plans, order was for moving the ark, and he pitched a tent in Jerusalem ready to receive the ark. His preparations were more thorough this time than on the previous occasion, and he had repented to ensure he did things Gods way.

This is an important thing for everyone of us to learn, when we have blown it, when we have made a mess of something in our lives, our repentance should include taking time out to come honestly before God and ask Him what went wrong, and how to avoid doing it again. A quick sorry and promise not to do it again can fail if we do not pursue His plan, study His word, take godly counsel, make ourselves accountable and do all that we can to prepare ourselves for the next venture. David's failure to do things Gods way, impacted the whole body of believers, the body of believers, particularly the priests and particularly Uzzah, should have known better became complicit in not doing things Gods ways. A three month delay may not seem a lot, but the nation was without 100's of thousands of people were deprived of the blessing of God for not doing things His way.

This time David gathers the priests together with the other leaders and says:

1 Chron 15:13 For because you did not do it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order." NKJV

This time the responsibility for carrying the ark, and determining who the worshippers were was placed with the Levites. This time the incredibly sized unrehearsed orchestra, was replaced with a worship director and there was to be singers who would sing with JOY. This time you did not get to chose which songs you sang, or who you played your instruments with, you were told and you were told to do it with JOY.

1 Chron 15:22 . was instructor in charge of the music, because he was skillful; NKJV

We will talk about being prepared to worship in more detail on another occasion, save to point out that 1 Chronicles 15 shows a considerable amount of preparation went into the whole process of moving the Presence with appropriate worship. Today we are looking at the essentials of having a prepared heart and attitude for broken repentant worship.

Having made the necessary arrangements to bring the ark back in the prescribed manner David seems to want to underline the significance of the event with the laboured way in which the ark is moved. Carrying the ark six steps, worshipping, dancing and sacrificing before moving on a further six steps is not known as the prescribed way of moving the ark. Can you imagine running from the Egyptians six steps at a time, or travelling in the heat of the wilderness six steps at a time.

There is some debate as to whether they really did just do six steps, but the Hebrew word translated paces means steps not six stages or other suggested distances. I know the Bible to be technically correct and Holy Spirit deliberately intended the word steps to be used to underline the significance and the cost the people actually went through.

The whole nation embarked, willingly and joyfully on a very costly journey, to bring the Presence of God back to the center stage of their lives.

My calculations are that a 4-5 mile journey from Kirjath Jearim would equate to approximately 10,000 sets of six paces. That would mean at least 10,000 sheep, 10,000 oxen being sacrificed, those shepherds and herdsmen bore a heavy cost to see His Presence back in their midst. 10,000 dances and 10,000 worship songs would exert considerable strain on the energies of the people as well. 10,000 altar building, wood gathering, fire lighting incidents involves a lot of people. Where do you get enough wood to burn 10000 ox and sheep on a 5 mile journey?

These people were certainly committed to moving the ark, there was incredible cost, and incredible sweat. Deodorants and Anti Perspirants were not around can you image dancing next to a brother and sister after they had lifted their arms 10,000 times in worship?

The lesson these people learnt was what all Christians have to learn, we need to persevere if we want to see His Presence in our midst.

2 Peter 1:5-8 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rom 5:3-5 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

I do not know about you it just takes me a little while to remember and acknowledge my sufferings can be for my good. It just takes a little while to get to that place of faith that God intends nothing for my destruction, but for my preparation.

Oh what joy when we persevere through the costs, the pains, the sweat, the offerings and find God is POURING His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Oh what joy it is when I see the smile on His face as He accepts my repentant, submissive broken worship as a sweet smelling aroma.

Go the distance we must. Pay the cost we must. Sweat buckets we may. The reward having the tangible heavy Presence in our individual and corporate lives. I want to see the day when His Presence is so evident in our meetings that people will be drawn to them without even knowing why. I want His Presence to be so powerful in our lives that people fall down in repentance just as we walk by. Not because I want to be lazy about evangelising because the reality is His Presence comes from obedience to His commands which includes sharing the gospel, but hosting His Presence tells us and the world around that everything we do is pleasing Him and drawing Him near.