

"The Freedom of Devotion"

What if you found you were seeing things wrong. The things you thought were important weren't and the things that were very important, valuable and beautiful were despised by you? It can happen. It was one of the things Jesus taught. He said it is possible to live your life in spiritual blindness and miss what is good and beautiful. He used a very vivid image in one point he said, *Don't throw your pearls before swine lest they trample them under feet and attack you!*¹ That image captures something that takes place in the story we just read from the life of King David. One of the interesting things about this story is the contrast between David and his wife, Michal. The story falls into three movements.² Each one begins with David and ends with Michal. And the storyteller is asking you; *With whom do you identify? Who represents you in this story? And do you see why that matters?*

This story unfolds in three movements, but what we're going to do is take in the larger theme of the story and then look back at two lessons. As you may know, when David first appears in the Bible, he has been chosen to be the future king by God and anointed by the prophet Samuel. He defeats the most formidable enemy of God's people, the giant warrior Goliath. After that, he becomes the husband of the king's daughter, Michal and best friend of the king's son, Jonathon. The army revered him. The women sing his praises. Everything he touched turned to gold. Then a strange thing happened. One by one, all these good things began to be stripped away. Saul got jealous, went crazy, and started trying to kill David. David has to flee for his life into the wilderness. He experiences many dangers and adventures. He reveals some major weakness and some wonderful strengths. About twenty years after the battle with Goliath, the prophet Samuel dies. Soon after that, King Saul dies. It takes approximately seven years after the death of Saul for before the fighting for the throne of Israel subsides, and David is finally recognized as King over all of Israel. The story we're looking at this weekend takes place when David is in his forties, maybe around 26-28 years after his battle with Goliath. It is soon after he has secured his kingdom when he hears that the "ark of God" is nearby his capital city of Jerusalem. The ark was a special chest containing the Ten Commandments God had given Moses as well as other items of special significance that had been miraculously given to God's people.

In those days, the ark of God was reminder of God's provision, the symbol of God's presence, his rule, and his redemption. It had been neglected for many years. So when David became king, he decided to bring the ark as a symbol of God's kingship into the capital city, Jerusalem. The first time David tried to do this, it was done without reverence or carefulness, and the result was God's judgment on one man and a sober reminder of God's holiness for everyone. Now, when this story takes place three months later, David is ready to bring the ark to Jerusalem and to do it right with reverence and rejoicing.

As the joyful procession came into Jerusalem, **2 Samuel 6:14-16** says David took off his royal robes to wear the same simple, white linen robe the priests and singers wore that day. Michal was David's wife, the daughter of Saul, the previous king. Michal watched from her window. The Hebrew word *watched* means to look down from above. It seems like a picture of her state of mind. As she looked down on him and all the joyful worshippers she saw that David *"danced before the LORD with all his might,"* and, *"she despised him in her heart."* When he came home that evening she unloaded on him. She complained sarcastically; *"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!"*

She thought his joyful worship was beneath the dignity that he should have guarded as the king. A linen ephod was a humble and simple garment but it was not obscene, that wasn't really the point.

The point was that David, in the presence of God, set aside his pride. ***He experienced the freedom of true devotion, which is a beautiful thing to God.*** But Michal saw it differently. She looked out her window and despised him in her heart. It is interesting that each of the three times she is mentioned in the story she is never called David's wife. She is always called the daughter of Saul. It's not just that she is called *the daughter of Saul* but every time she is mentioned that is added. The reason is her heart is not like David's. It is like Saul's. She doesn't see or think spiritually. David reminded her that it was God who had chosen him, and he told her that *He would celebrate before the LORD.* That's the highpoint of the story, but there is a sadness, and a sort of warning that follows for the last verses says, *"And Michal daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death."* From this day forward, the words that describe Michal are "barren," "childless," and "unfruitful." We aren't told if David rejected any relationship with her or she rejected

a relationship with him after that day or if God just judged her in this way, but the story is clearly meant to teach us and maybe to warn us.

The first thing we learn is that...

I. THE FREEDOM TO RESPOND TO GOD WITH TRUE DEVOTION IS A BEAUTIFUL THING: DO NOT DESPISE IT.

Verse 12: David brought the ark up *with rejoicing*.

It is beautiful for our rejoicing in God to be expressed. The word *rejoicing* describes something that begins on the inside. Throughout this story, what you see is heartfelt joy expressed in outward praise. The Bible says that it is a good, life-giving, and God-pleasing thing.

It is beautiful when our rejoicing is expressed whole-heartedly. You see that in **verse 14** *David danced before the LORD with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod.* David removed the robes that marked him as the king and joined the others in worship. He danced. He was worshipping *with all his might*. How do you worship? With indifference and restraint or all in. Cultures are different but shouldn't we all be engaged, earnest, and sincere in your worship?

It is beautiful when we live our lives "before the LORD." The critical thing is not that we wear linen ephods or dance. I believe those things are circumstantial. What is essential is expressed in the key phrase in **verse 14**, which is repeated three more times in the story. What he did in his rejoicing was *before the Lord*. The words, "*before the LORD*" are literally "*before the face of the LORD*."

There is a question implied all through the story: *Are you more like David or Michal?* One way to understand the underlying issue in this story and to let it search *your* life is to see that the difference between David and Michal is that they have different passions and priorities. Over and over, David is described as doing all that he is doing "before the LORD." That phrase appears repeatedly in this story. David *rejoices* before the LORD, he *offers sacrifices* before the LORD, and he *celebrates* before the LORD.³ Michal is only concerned with how things look in the eyes of people. She talks about honor and shame in the eyes of the servants. She never once even mentions the LORD. She wants status, honor, and respect. Those things are not terrible in themselves, but they are not what matters most. C.S. Lewis said the greatest battle you face is keeping first things first and keeping

everything else in its place as secondary. We all have many desires and passions. We want a good job, a happy marriage, healthy children, money to play with, and things to do. All of these ordinary passions are second place. As long as they remain second and your relationship to God and faith in and joy in him is first, it's fine. But for Michal, it is as if those secondary things are all that matter or at least those things are the real things that matter most.

Augustine has a little illustration or parable about first things and second things. He said, Imagine God said: *"Make a list of everything you want. Write it out. Take your time."* Then God says, *"I'll give you all of it on one condition – that you never see my face."* He says – *"Your horror at that prospect is your love for God."* It's easy to put yourself in the place of David. But, is that really where you belong? Please choose that path. Put God at the center. Love God above every other love. **The freedom to respond to God with true devotion is a beautiful thing: do not despise it –embrace it and enjoy it.**

In **Psalm 27**, David says the one over-riding passion of his life was to *behold the beauty of the LORD*. Think about some area of your life where there is something you want to achieve or attain: maybe a problem you want fixed, an issue resolved, a wound healed. Whatever it is that is on your heart what would it look like for you to deal with that *before the LORD*. What would it be like to deal with that thing in the beautiful freedom of devotion to God? Repentance in the Bible doesn't have to be a dark, sad, solemn thing that weighs you down. It's a liberating, freeing, decision to turn toward the face of God and to walk and even dance, rejoicing in the light of His glory and goodness and his love and grace for you. Are you Michal or David? She's the daughter of Saul; there are so many that share that spirit of self-obsession. At this point in his life at least for a season, David is a child of God and of grace, and it's beautiful.

There is an emphasis on grace in the story that modern Christians might miss. The second lesson of the story is that...

II. THE FREEDOM TO REFLECT GOD'S GRACE IS A BEAUTIFUL THING: WE SHOULD NOT NEGLECT IT.

What is grace? Grace refers to God's love and mercy given to you, when you do not deserve it. We need undeserved love from God because we have broken his laws and sinned against him. We deserve his judgment, so we need grace.

Where do we see grace in this story? Look at **verse 17**, *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.* In *The Story of God*, before the coming of Christ, the strongest way to express the need for grace and promise of grace was with sacrifice.

The burnt offering underscores the need for grace. Imagine, laying your hands on an animal to represent the idea that this animal was now going to represent your life than sacrificing that animal. With the burnt offering, nothing would be saved or eaten. The whole animal would be offered to God as payment for the sins of the worshippers.

The peace offering underscores the results of grace. Imagine another sacrifice where instead of it all being burnt, the animal is roasted. You give some meat to the priests and call in friends and family to share a feast. The feast is a joyful celebration that pictures The relationship, reconciliation, fellowship, and peace you enjoy with God and others because of grace. Look at **verse 18** *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 ¹⁹ 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.* The King represents God and in that role, blesses the people and gives gifts.

Illustration: So this would have been a powerful, and even sensual celebration. Every sense was engaged. You see the priests and the singers and even the king in their finely woven white linen that moved and swayed with them as they led in worship. You hear the music of celebration. You smell the sacrifices roasting on the altars of open fires. You touch the meat of the peace offering, and you taste it as you share the meal. It was meant to make an impression about the grace we so deeply need and the grace God so richly gives.

The Bible teaches that all this pageantry pointed to a spiritual reality as relevant to you as it was to them. In **Ephesians 5:2**, the apostle Paul says, *“live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”* What the animal sacrifices pictured so dramatically, and symbolically is what Jesus actually did for us on the cross. He died in our place. He suffered the

judgment we deserve for our sins. **Hebrews 10:10** says: *we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* The way you become holy in the eyes of God, the way you receive eternal life is not through your efforts. It is by faith in God's grace, expressed in the sacrifice that he alone provides, in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

There is a kind of beautiful gospel irony in the sarcastic words of Michal in **verse 20**. She says, *"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!"* Her sarcastic words reveal a reality to which she is totally blind. God's chosen king; the king who worships the LORD, offers the sacrifice, and blesses the people and gives gifts of grace. What kind of a king is he? Just take out the sarcasm of spiritual blindness, and you have a perfect description not only of king David but of King Jesus. There was another powerful moment in history, when for a few hours, those words, freed from their foolish sarcasm, perfectly described God's true king.

In **Philippians 2**, the apostle Paul says that Jesus *emptied himself* He took off the all the trappings of glory, humbled himself came down among us and became the sacrifice for us. There will always be people like Michal who just don't get it. There will also be people like the servant girls David speaks of, humble people, who welcome the presence of the king who humbles himself so they can be blessed. David is not only a picture of *how* to worship but of *who* we should honor and worship with all our might. To worship Jesus with great devotion is a beautiful thing.

Henri Nouwen was a spiritual leader who had a tremendous impact through his life and writings. He once said,

I cannot continuously say "no" to this or "no" to that unless there is something ten times more attractive to choose. Saying no to my lust, my greed, my needs, and the world's powers takes an enormous amount of energy. The only hope is to find something so obviously real and attractive that I can devote all my energies to saying "yes."

He went on to say was that the only thing he found that was great enough to warrant his “yes!” was the love of God in Jesus. When you know that in your total brokenness you are deeply loved you have a compelling reason for worship and rejoicing. Worship him and be devoted to him above all other things. Worship him with your whole life. ***The freedom of great devotion is a beautiful thing. Live it.***

Amen

Prayer of Response

God of all grace search our hearts. Show us wherever the spirit of Saul and of Michal tries to lay claim to our hearts. Enable to choose instead to live *"before the LORD."* Help us to discover the freedom of devotion so that all of life becomes worship. We thank you and renew our faith In Jesus, the true king and only saving sacrifice for our sins. May he rule our hearts as we rejoice in Him.

¹ Matthew 7:6

² The sections are 1.) 12-16, 2.) 17-20 and 3.) 21-23

³ In verse 14, 17, and twice in verse 21.