

David and the Ark of God - God's Way

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas emphasizes the importance of heartfelt worship and the dangers of ritualism in the relationship between God and His people through the story of David and the Ark of God.

Duration: 1:33:51

Scripture: 2 Samuel 6:6

Topics: "Ark Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the spiritual decline in the time of Eli, the last of the judges. Eli had ordained his wicked sons into the ministry, and they treated him with contempt. The Israelites were enthusiastic in their worship, but their enthusiasm was not enough for God. The preacher emphasizes the importance of truth and the need for a genuine relationship with God, rather than just going through the motions of religious rituals. The sermon also highlights the significance of allowing God to work through us and the necessity of relying on Him for our spiritual growth.

Transcript

You too will anticipate God's rich blessing, which none of us deserve, but then he never said we did. That's the beauty of it. But he delights to give us what we don't deserve, so we'll anticipate as the recipients of his bounty.

All that he has to say to us and all that he wants to do in us and be through us to others. We've just come from Foulbrook, near San Diego, California today, where over this past weekend we've had our annual general meeting of the Torch Bearing Corporation in this country, and so we bring you warm greetings from each member of the Council, some of whom have been here. Darwin East, Bob Hobson.

Any of you know Bob Hobson? Well, he's as crazy as ever, and you'll be happy to know that. It would be very disappointing if he really became as sane as everybody else. So they send you their warm greetings.

One sad note is that only just two or three weeks ago in New Zealand, the absent member of our Council, who was our representative as a Council member in New Zealand, was called suddenly to be with his Lord, which is fantastic for him, glorious, but we shall miss him greatly. Noel Hunt was the Torch Bearing Director in New Zealand, and was solid rock. He was a marvellous anchorage, and he stood by us, and always had, through thick and thin, and immovable in his solid love for the Lord Jesus, and total unquestioning loyalty to him.

So we rejoice with him, but also we feel naturally deep sympathy for those who are going to miss him, in particular his wife Doreen, and others for whom he gave such fantastic leadership over a number of years, not the least our own son Peter, who often was in their home, and they were like a mum and dad to him. So remember New Zealand in this transition period of time, God's gloriously undertaking, and we are thankful. A woman prayed.

The preacher thought she was drunk. A boy heard the voice of God. The preacher thought he was dreaming.

See, it was a time of deep spiritual decline in the midst of God's people. You'll remember the incidents in the first book of Samuel. Hannah was praying much that God would be gracious to her, who till then had been incapable of bearing, barren, that she might have a son.

And in the first chapter of the first book of Samuel, came to pass, as she continued praying, verse 12, before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart, because that's where God's looking. Only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard, except, of course, by God.

Therefore Eli thought she had been drunken, and Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from me. Hannah answered and said, No, my Lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit. I've drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.

Sad, isn't it, when a woman prays with a heart? Countless people have learned long since to pray with their lips, and God doesn't even hear what they have to say. But here was a woman who knew how to pray with a heart. The preacher thought she was drunk.

Well, God heard her prayer. A little baby boy was born, and as she had declared before God, she dedicated him to his service, Samuel. When that boy heard the voice of God, as well you know, in the third chapter, Eli thought he was dreaming.

You see, in those days when people went to church, they never expected to hear other than the voice of man, and the preacher never ever expected anybody to hear the voice of God. Isn't that sad? That's tragically true in countless communities where there's that which is called church in their midst. People go to hear the voice of a man, and the preacher doesn't even expect them to hear the voice of God.

That's why, of course, when Samuel heard the voice of God, he ran to Eli, the preacher. But Samuel did not yet know the law. I suppose he was about 12 years of age.

It's the best age for anybody to be, because that's the best age to get converted. I was converted at the age of 12, and it's an unusually critical moment in the life of any boy of God. I've discovered that.

It's amazing how many are converted at the age of 12. But you see, at that time, and that's why he did not yet know the law, because till then he had never heard the word of God from the lips of a man. That's why God had to speak to him direct.

God had to do the same with Saul of Tarsus. Remember that? Because the last person in all the world that the disciples anticipated would become a Christian, let alone an apostle, the twelfth. Saul of Tarsus, he was the archenemy of the early church.

It was his supreme delight to sling into jail, or even due to death, any who dared to say that Jesus was the Christ of God. When he stood by consenting to the death of Stephen, saw his blood run in the gutter, heard his bones snap as he was stoned to death, he relished every moment of it. Who would imagine that he, of all people, would get converted and become the apostle Paul, so that wherever he went teaching the word, he left a church behind.

So I don't suppose anybody ever talked to him about Jesus. God did. The Lord Jesus came direct, personally, and spoke to him on the road to Damascus.

It doesn't relieve us of our responsibility. It's not a cop-out that God's going to speak to him anyway, even if I don't, God will hold you blood guilty if you don't, as he would hold Eli blood guilty, of what that boy never truly heard from his lips, because it says there in the third chapter that the word of the Lord, verse one, was precious in those days. That doesn't mean what you might think it means.

Chapter three, verse one, the word of the Lord was precious. Things that are precious are usually those things that are scarce, and that's what it really means. The word precious means rare.

Rare. If anybody ever heard really God's word, it was almost by accident. It was rare.

But Samuel had a heart for God, but he really didn't know how to find God. But God could tell that, took care, he always does. One of the supreme privileges that are yours and mine is to be those through whom God can speak with our lips, with our touch, with the tone of our voice, the look on our face, the smile in our eyes.

Wherever you and I go, we evangelize by letting him loose whose life we share, not I, Christ, living in me. Well, that was the situation. The word of God was rare, and ritual had long since taken the place of reality, and token long since had taken the place of total obedience.

There was no open vision, it says, end of that verse one, and it came to pass at that time when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim that he could not see in air, the lamp of God went out. The lamp of God never should have gone out. To save the moment, you needn't turn to it, but just make a note on the side of your Bible that Exodus 27 verse 20.

Exodus 27 verse 20. Add to that Leviticus 24 and verse 2, because there we're told that lamp should burn continuously. It was never to go out, but you see, we've learned long since, alas, in our day and age to substitute token for total.

That's when reality is replaced by ritual, when we go through the motions and we cherish what is only intended to be a picture for the substance of our faith. Countless people are baptized in the name of Jesus and haven't a clue as to what it really means. To them, it's simply joining a religious community.

They know nothing of what we have been singing, I am crucified with Christ, buried with him in baptism, spiritual baptism whereby God recognizes us to be judicially executed in the person of another. Deserving us, we do no more nor less than what happened to the one who took your place in mine, sentenced, executed, and buried. That's baptism.

That's when in public confession of your faith, you tell your friends, your mum, your dad, your brothers, your sisters, your fellow students, your workmates, your fellow drivers on the road, that the kind of person they knew you wanted to be apart from Christ, they can forget, because you're buried with him. And when

you come up out of the water, what you're telling them is this, I give you the absolute right now to look at me at any time, day or night, and no longer see me behaving, but Christ. Because I'm risen together with him, so that he, clothed with my humanity, can walk the streets of this city again, and sit around my breakfast table, and rub shoulders with my fellow man, so that with my hands, some child will feel his touch.

Through my lips, some woman will hear his voice. Looking into my face, some frightened man will see him smile. That's baptism.

I'm crucified with Christ, buried beneath the water, nevertheless I live, yet not I, Christ lives in me, risen from the dead. My hands are his to work, with feet to walk, with lips to speak, with eyes to see, with ears to hear, with mind to think, with heart to love, that's being a Christian. Christianity is Christ-inuity, no longer I, Christ, living in me, as we've been hearing.

Because that's the gospel, that is the gospel, there is no other. But long since, you see, the token has taken the place of total, the ritual has taken the place reality. That's why, if you can't lead a person to that identity with Christ and death and resurrection, you won't count how many been born again, regenerate, you'll simply count how many baptisms.

If you can't learn to bring somebody to receive Christ by faith in their hearts, then you'll give them a little wafer, a piece of bread, and you won't count how many have truly been redeemed. You'll only number your communicant. The ritual has taken the place of reality.

In the same way, in the study of God's Word, you can be textually aware and memorize whole chunks of it and remain spiritually unenlightened. And imagine that your spirituality or your maturity as a Christian may be recognized only in terms of how many Bible verses that you've memorized or doctrines you've mastered, though it may make not the slightest difference to the way you live. Well, that was the situation then in the time of Eli, time of deep spiritual decline.

A pathetic old man, the last of the judges, who ordained his two wicked sons into the ministry as a matter of family convenience. He was a man who had learned to live with sin, and when he had ordained them, though rebuked by their father, they treated him with the contempt he deserved. What a miserable situation.

And it was against that background, you remember, Israel was thrashed by the Philistines, and the ark of God was captured by their enemies and carried away. When they were in deep trouble on the battlefield, they said, let's get the ark, for it will save us. You see, their relationship to a living God had been reduced to an external observance.

It had taken the place of him. You can do that too. Christianity isn't a number of its procedures, programs, concepts.

Christianity is Christ, somebody. It will never save you. People come to me sometimes and say, I've begun to grasp, you know, what the Bible's all about, but it doesn't work.

Well, it never did work, and God never expected it to work, because the Lord Jesus said, not without it you can do nothing. He said, without me you can do nothing. But the church by and large today has learned to substitute Christianity for Christ, sometimes conservatively evangelical biblical Christianity, but it's become a substitute for Christ himself, and it won't save you.

We've substituted religion for God, but religion won't save you. We've substituted programs, crusades, endeavours, goals, for God the Holy Spirit at work, clothed with the humanity of a forgiven sinner through whom alone he Christ, now risen from the dead, can share his life with us on earth as once the Father, by the same Holy Spirit, shared his life with him on earth. That's dead religion, no matter how biblical.

It's the letter of the law that kills. It's the Bible, as ineffective as it was to those then who studied it, thinking that in it they would find eternal life. But, said Jesus, you will not come to me, that you might have life.

And if the Bible to you is an it, as it was to them then, their textbook, then you've got a dead Bible, and it wasn't long before they had a dead Christ. They crucified him. Little wonder that Samuel didn't know the law.

Well, the ark of the covenant that they took from beneath the mercy seat in the holiest of all, detaching it from the place where it belonged, where God himself would appear in the Shekinah glory above the seraphims, finally ended up in the house of Abinadab, where it remained for 20 years. And when Saul came as the first king to the throne, who began so brightly, but a man who knew God, but played the fool, and finally ended up, even then unsuccessfully, in an attempt to kill himself, and was murdered by one of the enemies of God, whom he in sentimental misguided compassion spared from God's judgment, he never once tried to get the ark back where it belonged. Not until David came to the throne.

And after that long period of spiritual decline and spiritual bankruptcy, there was a man who had a heart for God. So turn to it in the second, the first book of Chronicles, in chapter 13. First book of Chronicles, in chapter 13, Saul is dead, and Jonathan, who paid the price in death for his father's folly, and whom David loved dearly.

David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, if it seemed good unto you, and that it be of the Lord our God, he was utterly sincere, he wanted this really to represent the mind of God. He did what he did with the best will in the world.

He said, let us send abroad unto our brethren everywhere that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us. And let us bring again the ark of our God to us. Let's get it back where it belonged.

Let's get it into its true relationship with him. Let's get reality back into the ritual. Let's get substance back into our faith.

Let's get God back where he belongs. Great, because that's why God chose him as a little kid, the bunch of sheep on the hillside. Because the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, that he, God, might show himself strong on the behalf of those whose hearts are perfect toward him, not their lips, hearts.

Let us bring again the ark of our God to us. For we inquired not at it in the days of Saul, and all the congregations said they would do so. For the thing was right in the eyes of all the people.

You see, they'd hit bottom. And perhaps the most encouraging thing is to recognize that when individually or corporately, as a church or a nation, people hit bottom. There's only one way to move.

That's up. And we may anticipate that in God's goodness, he'll raise up somebody whose heart he has found perfect toward him. And the people were, I believe, sick and tired of the state of spiritual barrenness that they'd known for so long, as countless are today in their churches, that are sterile.

They're crying out. Much of the extravagances that we encountered today derives from almost frustration on the part of those who say there must be something more than this in knowing God. And of course there is.

Jesus Christ. Not it, but him. So when there was a man to take the lead, they followed him.

All the congregations said they would do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of the people. So David gathered all Israel together from Shehor of Egypt, even unto the entering of Hemath, to bring the ark of God from Kirgith-Jerim, where it had been for so long in the house of Abinadab. And it says, verse 7, they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab.

And Uzzah and Ahio drove the cart. Brand new cart. David said in his heart, nothing less than the best, best for God.

Did he mean it? Of course he did. Was he sincere? Totally. Who was he trying to outdo? Well, the Philistines.

Because they returned the ark of God on a brand new cart. And so thought David to himself, if the world can do that, we can do better. David and all Israel played before God with all their might, with singing, harps, with psalteries, and with temporals, and with cymbals, and with trumpets.

The crowd was there. Tens of thousands of them. This was going to be a fantastic day.

They were going to get the ark back to where it belonged. Everybody was dancing up and down, singing, clashing their timbrels, wild enthusiasm. And nobly motivated, sincerely intended, with the best will in the world.

Because they didn't know any better. They thought this was revival. It would have been banner headlines in our Christian period, as they moody monthly would have devoted a whole edition to what was going on.

No challenge to their sincerity or their enthusiasm. But you see, what they didn't know at this stage was that enthusiasm is no substitute for truth. To arouse the motions of tens of thousands of people and get them on the march isn't good enough, from God's point of view.

This is where the church of Jesus Christ today, in our evangelical constituency, is being taken for a ride. And they don't even know it. When they came, verse 9, under the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzzah put forth his hand to hold the ark.

He was one of the two, Uzzah and Ahio, in verse 7, who drove the cart. They got to a bit of uneven ground, and the ark was in danger of falling, and Uzzah put forth his hand to hold it, for the oxen stumbled. In verse 10, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark, and there he died before God.

God struck him dead. And in the midst of all their excitement, while they're all singing and laughing and so full of enthusiasm, they were going to get the ark back where it belonged. This is going to please God.

And God suddenly answered all their enthusiasm, all the excitement with death, and all the singing froze in their lips. The smiles were wiped from their faces, and there was a deathly hush. And perhaps understandably, verse 11, David was displeased.

And verse 12 tells us, he was afraid of God that day. Almost in despair, in frustration, he cries, how shall I bring the ark of God home to me? God, I've done my best. I've got all these people.

I've whipped up their enthusiasm. They're dedicated to the last man. They're following me, every one of them, with all their families.

We're here to do business with God. Can you answer us with death? How, if we've done our best, can we accomplish anything if you only answer us with death? It was a phrase of God. You ever been afraid of God? Do you know what the Bible says? The fear of God is what? The beginning of wisdom.

You see, David didn't know it, but he hadn't begun to be wise. He was substituting what he thought was right in his own eyes, for what he could only learn from God himself. But do you know his problem? He'd never taken the trouble to find out what only God could teach him.

That's why we have Bible schools. That's why those of you who are students here are at His hill right now. Not to whip up your enthusiasm, not to get you motivated, you know, flex your muscles, grit your teeth, clench your fists, and say we're going to go out and do something for God.

God forbid. He'd answer you with death, and us. You see, we have Bible schools not to find more about the Bible in itself.

We need to discover more about the truth. Because you can only find more about the truth by getting to know more about the Bible, that's true. But the tragedy is you can get to know a whole bunch about the Bible and never discover the truth.

That's why the scribes and pharisees, the theologians of his day, then crucified Christ, and many in our own generation would do it again. See, there's only one person who can teach you the Bible, one who wrote it, and he doesn't even have a PhD. He just happens to be God.

That was David's problem. It was the problem of all these people. There wasn't anybody to tap him on the shoulder and say, excuse me, King David, maybe we're going about this the wrong way.

He said, how can we be going about it the wrong way when all these tens of thousands of people here are as exciting and enthusiastic as they are? How can we be doing it the wrong way? Well, God showed him, and Nazareth died. Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. There's one thing missing in our evangelical churches today, it's any sense of God, fear of God.

It's the evangelical done thing now, you know, after about 10 minutes, the beginning of the service, to have everybody rushing around, thumping everybody on the back, it's like a shopping centre or a circus. There's no fear of God. Very often you go to a liberal church and there's a greater sense of God than in our evangelical churches.

They go into the house of God and get on their knees. You don't even hear a whisper. And that isn't just play acting.

They don't know enough, maybe, to get them to say some of them. Some of them do. But you might think they're in the wrong place.

But maybe they have the right relationship. So David brought not the ark home to himself to the city of David, he carried it aside in the house of Obed-Edom. And the ark of God, verse 14, remained with the family of Obed-Edom in the house three months.

The Lord blessed the house of Obed-Edom, all that he had. And David went home. He failed, hopelessly, in the noblest endeavour that could ever have flooded his heart at that time.

But he failed. I'm glad to tell you he didn't go home to sulk, because the fear of God's the beginning of wisdom. He learned to fear God.

He learned that there's somebody more important than the clamour of the crowd, or the congratulations of the crowd, or the enthusiasm of the crowd, or the consensus of the crowd. He learned that there was only one person who had the right to speak, who said what he meant, meant what he said, and had the right to say it. He didn't go home to sulk.

He was very wise, because the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. What do you think he did? He read his Bible. He went to a three-month short-term mini-Bible school.

How do we know? Well, as I trust it will be the case maybe with some of you, after a three-month short-term mini-Bible school, he felt himself now in a position to do what he once had tried to do and failed. Chapter 15. David made him houses in the city of David and prepared a place for the ark of God, pitched for it a tent.

Then he said this, verse 2 of chapter 15. None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites, for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God and to minister unto him forever. And once again, verse 3, David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the Lord unto his place, which he had prepared for.

In other words, he was now prepared three months later to do what three months before he had tried to do and failed. David, we're told in verse 11, called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests. He said to them, verse 12, you're the chief of the fathers of the Levites.

Sanctify yourselves, both you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of God, the Lord God of Israel, unto the place that I prepared for it. For, said he, and here's his word of explanation, for because you did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us. For that we sought him.

No challenge to that fact, we sought him. We were set on doing what was right. We wanted to be pleasing.

We really wanted to get the job done. We sought him, not after the due order. We didn't even consult him.

In our abysmal ignorance of God's word, we went about the job as though we had the right to decide how. That's why God answered us with death. We sought him, but not after the due order.

As though it didn't really matter what God thought, so long as only he thought us busy, enthusiastic, on the ball, everybody on the bandwagon. So long as we were excited enough and enthusiastic enough, and so long as there were crowds, that was all that mattered, whatever God might think. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel, and the children of the Levites

bear the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon as Moses commanded.

Is that just a man's idea? Were they simply trying to be Mosites? You know, like Lutherans, or Wesleyans, or Mennonites, or whatever it might be, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord. They recognized that God had spoken on the lips of his servant Moses and given clear instructions. Well, how did David find all that out? How do you think he found it out? Well, he read his Bible.

That's all. Simple, isn't it? When do you think the Church of Jesus Christ is really going to get back to reality? Well, when a few people with a heart for God begin to read their Bibles and let God talk to them, not listen to people preaching from their Bibles and communicating what they reinterpret as being what God says. That's what those who crucified Christ had done.

He said, if you had believed Moses instead of reinterpreting Moses, you'd believe me. He wrote of me. He wrote of me.

But instead of recognizing that what he said was what God had to say, borrowing only his lips to say it, you reinterpreted Moses to suit your own convenience. And you've created a false Christianity, which is totally destitute of its spiritual substance. You search the Scriptures, in them you think you have eternal life, interpret it as you think fit, but you won't come to me, for these are they, the Scriptures that testify of me.

We can listen to a lot of preaching as simply a man's interpretation of what the Bible he thinks ought to have said. We can do the same ourselves, and often with no little sincerity, but abysmal ignorance of the truth, textually aware, a nice text to preach from, spiritually unenlightened. So we weave around the text all kinds of things that God never said nor intended.

It sounds very impressive. Folks slap you on the back and say, wonderful sermon. Or if it's the Southern Baptist Church at the door, they'll say, joyed it, joyed it, joyed it.

Not quite sure what they joyed, but it means you did a little act, and they probably didn't go to sleep that time. That was nice, they joyed it. David read his Bible.

So the children of the Levites had to bear the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves they're on, just exactly as God intended, and as indicated by Moses according to the word of the Lord. Where do you think David read in the Bible? Well, he didn't, of course, have the privilege that you and I have with an Old and a New Testament, and remember that in the early church they only had the Old Testament, and yet of that Old Testament, these scriptures, as Paul describes them, not the New Testament because they weren't written, but these scriptures, said he to Timothy, are able to make you wise under salvation through faith which is in Jesus. So everything that you and I could ever need to exercise saving faith in the Lord Jesus so that he can move redemptively and regeneratively into our experience, you'll find in the Old Testament whether or not you've got a new one.

The new one is simply a bonus. The New Testament simply tells us that the Lord Jesus did exactly what the Old Testament said he would, that's all. So we got a bonus, but of course David didn't even then have all that we have apart from a New Testament in our Old Testament.

So he read what he had got and let God teach him, and he did. He always will, and the best teacher, of all the world, was the one who wrote it, God the Holy Spirit. So turn to the book of Numbers and chapter 7. You see, by the command of God, Moses at God's specification had built the tabernacle in the wilderness that later was to be reproduced in more permanent form as the temple in the city of Jerusalem.

It came to pass, verse 1 of chapter 7 of the book of Numbers, on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle and had anointed it and sanctified it and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them and sanctified them that the princes of Israel, verse 3, brought their offering before the Lord. They wanted to celebrate the completion of what God had told Moses to do. They brought their offering before the Lord.

Six covered wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon or cart for two of the princes, and for each one an ox, and they brought them before the tabernacle. Well, there were twelve heads to the tribes of Israel, as well you know, and the Lord Jesus, according to the scriptures, was born of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, who became the father of the twelve tribes. That's why God had said to Abraham, whose name originally was Abraham, father of one nation, you're going to be the father of many nations, through his grandson, that of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of the tribe, one of the twelve, the tribe of Judah, of the house of David, in the city of David, Bethlehem, Christ might be born, of whom, through whom and to whom are all things, the word who was made flesh, Emmanuel, God with us, conceived miraculously of the Holy Spirit and fashioned the borrowed womb of a virgin girl.

So they brought six carts, twelve oxen, each of the heads of the tribes would share two carts, one cart between two, but each would have their own ox, so there was a cart for two and an ox for each, six carts. They brought them before the tabernacle. The Lord spake unto Moses saying, take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service.

So Moses took the wagons and the oxen and gave them unto the Levites. Now these were the three sons of Levi, who had been anointed to the Levitical priesthood. The name of the one was Gershon, verse seven, the name of another, verse eight, was Merari, and the name of the third, verse nine, was Kohath, Gershon, Merari, and Kohath, the three sons of Levi.

And the six carts and the twelve oxen were to be divided among the three. Well, are you good at mental arithmetic? You've got six carts and twelve oxen and three people to be the recipients. Well, see if your mathematics is now as good as Moses was then.

He said, of course, in that there are three, they're obviously going to have two carts each and four oxen, and that's what God said initially. He took the wagons, the oxen, gave them to the Levites, but two wagons, four oxen, he gave to Gershon, dead on. Threes unto twelve, four.

Threes unto six, two. Can you fault that? He'd get an A. Might even graduate. Most do without an A. But then, you see, verse eight, four wagons, eight oxen, he gave to the sons of Merari.

Well, something's gone wrong. He was dead on when it came to Gershon. Two carts, four oxen.

That leaves eight and four between the other two. But then it looks as though he commits a boob. His mathematics goes astray.

For he gave four wagons, eight oxen, to Merari, according to their sin. But unto, verse nine, the sons of Kohath, he gave none. No cart for Kohath.

Because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders. No cart for Kohath. For their office was to bear upon their shoulders.

What were they to bear upon their shoulders? No cart for Kohath. Turn to chapter four. Tells you a little bit about Kohath.

Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers. And then he goes on to say in verse four, which we'll read in a moment. And it then goes on to say in verse 15, when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it.

But they shall not touch any holy thing, as Uzzah did, when he stretched forth his hand to steady the ark, in defiance of exactly what God had said. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath. The ark was to be borne by the sons of Kohath, not on a cart, for there was no cart for Kohath, but upon their shoulders.

Now turn to the 25th chapter of Exodus, and verse 14. Exodus 25. In the earlier verses, God had been giving some specific instructions as to how the tabernacle, of course, should be built, and then concerning the ark of the covenant, that was to be in the holiest of all, representing the very presence of God, never ever to be detached from his presence, and placed beneath the mercy seat that was to be sprinkled with blood.

For you see, in this beautiful picture language that God gives us in the Old Testament, that found its glorious consummation and reality in the person of Jesus Christ, the mercy seat sprinkled with blood was to represent all that the Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross when he died for you, and for me. But the ark of the covenant that should never ever be detached from the person of our God or his Son Jesus, contained that which we shall examine if we have the opportunity, that represents the substance of our faith as a result of our acceptance of Christ as Redeemer, which is nothing more nor less than his presence by the Holy Spirit within the human spirit of a forgiven sinner. That's why the ark can never be detached from the mercy seat sprinkled with blood, because the ark speaks of his resurrection as the mercy seat speaks of his crucifixion.

You can't attach the one for the other, because he gave himself for us only that he might give himself to us. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us, for cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree. There's the mercy seat sprinkled with blood.

That, that, the blessing of Abraham, everything that God had in mind when he confirmed in Abraham the covenant that he had already made with a fallen race of fallen men, that the blessing of Abraham might now be fulfilled in us through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of his Holy Spirit, through whom the once crucified but now risen Lord comes to live within us and share his life with us and live that life through us. That's why you can never detach the ark from the mercy seat, any more than you can detach the mercy seat from the ark. To preach the life of Christ without his death is an exercise in futility, because it would only frustrate us, it would mock us, for he was without sin.

To preach his death without his resurrection, says Paul, would leave us of all men most miserable. If Christ be not risen again from the dead, my preaching is vain and your faith is vain, you're still in your sins. That's why the ark must never ever be detached from the mercy seat.

They shall make an ark of shittim wood, verse 10, two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, a cubit and a half, the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half, the height thereof. Then he gives specific details as

how it was to be overlaid with pure gold and so on. Then in verse 13, thou shalt make staves of shittim wood, overlay them with gold, and thou shalt put the staves, two pieces of wood overlaid with gold, into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be born with them.

In other words, the ark was to be made to specific dimensions, and on both sides there were rings, and through those rings there were to be placed two pieces of wood, that the ark might be borne upon the shoulders of the sons of Kohath, not on a cart, but on their shoulders. Now, just keep the place there open for a moment, we'll come back to it. But turn back to that fourth chapter of the book of Numbers, because in the third verse that I deliberately omitted, there's something very, very important, as to who of the sons of Kohath were to bear the ark, borne on two pieces of wood on their shoulders.

Verse three, Numbers in chapter four, from 30 years old and upward, even until 50 years old, all that enter into the house to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation, this shall be the service of the sons of Kohath. What is the specification of those who would be qualified to bear the ark upon their shoulders, on two pieces of wood? Not less than 30. How was the Lord Jesus when he began his public ministry? 30.

But he was not to be more than 50, not less than 30, not more than 50. Do you remember John chapter 8, when the Lord Jesus turned to the scribes and the Pharisees of his day, who should have known these scriptures just as David should have known. And he said, Abraham, rejoice to see my day.

And almost sarcastically, they said, you want us to believe that you've seen Moses and you're not yet 50 years of age. And the Lord Jesus said, before Abraham was, you're past tense. I am.

So the Lord Jesus was a man not less than 30, and not yet more than 50. And these were they of the sons of Kohath, who were to bear the ark, representing the substance of your salvation and mine, on their shoulders, two pieces of wood. Who is it that not less than 30, not more than 50, bore on his shoulders two pieces of wood? What was his name? Jesus.

The cross. And you see, there is no substitute for God's dear son. Not men, nor means, nor methods, no matter how nobly mobilized, no matter what enthusiasm, no matter with what joy or dedication they seek to do the job, none can ever be a substitute for the man of God's choosing.

Not less than 30, not more than 50, with two pieces of wood on his shoulders. Only he can do the job. That's why we're going to talk about him in these few days and sing about him.

The Lord Jesus himself, none other. For there is for him no substitute. Begins with him and ends with him.

He's the way, he's the truth, and he is the life. And no man, no man, comes to the Father but by him. No matter how excited we may beget, no matter how we mobilize the crowds, no matter how we arouse their enthusiasm, no matter with what sincerity they dedicate themselves to the task, if we do it in ignorance of what God has to say, and ignore his Son, on God's terms, he answers us with death.

You're afraid of God. Until in despair you cry, God, how? I've done my best. And God says your best will never ever be enough.

Because it takes a man not less than 30, not more than 50, with two pieces of wood on his shoulders to do the job. And there is no substitute for the man of my choosing. If only we'd learn it in all its sublime simplicity.

Made articulate by our Lord Jesus when he said, without me you can do nothing. Nothing. No more than as man I can do without my Father.

Because we made man that way. In such a way so engineered that the presence of the Creator within the creature is indispensable to his humanity. And I came into this world to restore you to that relationship that lets me as God be in you as once in the sinlessness of my humanity, I allowed my Father as God to be in me, so that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

Now, let's pray. There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. There's a door that is open, and you may go in.

But at Calvary's cross is where you begin, when you come as a sinner to Jesus. A man not less than 30, not more than 50, two pieces of wood on his shoulder, who bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that being reconciled to God, we might without doing violence to God's righteousness become the recipients of his resurrection life. Step out into the dawn of every new day as those who cleanse from their sins have been re-invaded by deity, to be that humanity on earth with which now today the Lord Jesus clothes his divine activity.

And we can say and know that it's true. For me to come alive, be alive, and stay alive, is Christ himself. Thank you, loving Saviour, for all that you've done, so that we may enjoy all that you are.

We thank you for the incredible inheritance which is ours in you. But we recognize tonight that that is comparatively unimportant, purely secondary to that which is your inheritance in us, the right to be God in the man, in action. Help us, loving Saviour, to have a healthy fear, a wholesome awe of God, so that we may not treat your word casually, as though it didn't really matter, as though it was just a religious belief.

Help us to recognize it for what it truly is, the Word of God. When you say something, you mean what you say, and say exactly and precisely what you mean, and obey it. So then we will receive your smile of blessing.

So then may we joyfully get the job done. But in all that divine energy that is ours because of who you are, our risen, indwelling Lord, living where you do, thanks for the cross. But thanks for the gain of that cross, life replacing death.

All in your own dear and peerless and precious name, for your name is Jesus, for you save your people from their sins, the only one who can. Thank you. Amen.

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