

Calm the Chaos.5.To Give Thanks
1 Chronicles 16:28-36
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Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. 29 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. 30 Tremble before him, all the earth! The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.

31 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!" 32 Let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them! 33 Let the trees of the forest sing, let them sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth.

34 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. 35 Cry out, "Save us, God our Savior; gather us and deliver us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name, and glory in your praise."

36 Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.

Then all the people said "Amen" and "Praise the Lord."

First Chronicles chapter 16 – that’s where we are today, if you’d like to turn back there.

Where the books of Samuel and Kings are written as more of a stark, political history of Israel, Chronicles is written with a charitable and inspirational nod...to Israel’s spiritual heritage and hope.

So the history is the same, but the emphases are different.

Chronicles chapter 16.

Years ago, I heard or read...I can’t remember which...a statement that’s stuck with me that says: "It is impossible to stay angry with someone for whom you regularly pray."

"It’s impossible to remain angry or otherwise upset with a person for whom you faithfully pray."

Now, you may not believe that...just on the surface of it. But if you put it to the test – as I’m sure some of us here have – you’ll find it’s true.

If we are upset with someone...**and**...if we **really** want to get **past** it...

That second part is important because...some people don’t.

Some people don’t **want** to get past being **upset** with someone else, because they **like** being upset. Their anger gives them an identity...something to think about and talk about.

That’s a sad state of existence that will chew them up over time...and some choose to live there.

But no one *has* to live there.

If you want rid of anger held against someone else...if you will *choose* to *pray regularly*...let's say *daily*...for that person...

It doesn't have to be for a long time every day...just pray *briefly*, every day, that God would *bless* and *keep* and *protect* the subject of your anger, if we'll do that, God will *replace* that *anger* within us toward that person with *love* for them, because *that's* what God does when He is genuinely invited into human relationships.

He replaces anger with love...His love...which makes it impossible to remain upset with that person.

Try it.

If you're sincere...if you genuinely want rid of your anger, you'll find God will work in that way.

I'll tell you...this is a good thing to know entering into the holiday season.

"It's impossible to remain angry with a person for whom you pray."

That is one truth you can depend on.

And our theme for today gives us another: "The practice of giving thanks calms chaos within us."

The act...the discipline...and it *does* take *some* measure of discipline to do it...the act of *consistently expressing thanks* to God calms the chaos that tends to creep into our souls.

Why?

It's not magic.

It's not psychology.

It's not because of the power of some mindless mantra.

Thanksgiving calms chaos because the expression of gratitude to God actually resets our internal attentions.

Giving thanks realigns our attitude.

It recalibrates our reality.

And since we live, day to day, in a broken, sinful world, we all need our attitude realigned and our reality recalibrated...more often than we think...and far more often than once a year in late November.

This passage is taken from an account in Chronicles that provides a great example of a thankful person and an unthankful person...and what those practices wound up doing in their lives.

The Ark of the Covenant...Israel's holy box, if you will, that contained the ten commandments, Moses' staff, and other things that symbolized God's presence in their midst...the Ark had, before King Saul's reign, been captured by the Philistines.

But because God brought all sorts of tragedy to them while they housed it, they decided to return it to Israel, so they loaded it on an oxcart and sent it away, and the oxen pulled it back into Israel, and it wound up at the house of Abinadab, where it stayed for over 40 years.

In that time, Saul died and David became king, and after he takes Jerusalem as his capital, David decides to bring the Ark there.

But, because David and his compatriots did not do the appropriate research, the first attempt to do so did not go well, especially for a fellow named Uzzah.

Instead of God's prescribed method of ark transport – which involved priests and poles – David used the Philistine method – an oxcart, and when the ox stumbled and the Ark slid, Uzzah reached out to steady it...and God struck him dead...and apparently very violently so; one translator says Uzzah more or less exploded.

Let me mention, parenthetically...here's a great lesson in our dealing with God: it's true God cares about the state of our hearts toward Him. Still, there is no excuse for our not doing due diligence. God, in His holiness, fully expects us to learn and then to do as He asks, not only for His glory, but also for our own well-being.

In other words, in God's economy, there is a right and a wrong way to do things, and those are God's to determine, and the best motive in the world doesn't just erase that.

As the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 5, ***“Mature Christ-followers are to live as children of light...we are to find out what pleases the Lord.”***

Anyway, as you might imagine, the death of Uzzah was quite a setback for David, the new king, and it apparently took him about three months to figure out how to rightly transport the Ark, but he did find out and so he returned to his mission – with right form this time – and brought the Ark to Jerusalem and set it in the tent he'd prepared.

Chapters 15 and 16 of Chronicles tell that story...and it's here that we get the great contrast in attitude and perceptions – between King David and his wife...Michal, the daughter of Saul.

Here, at this restoration of the ark to Jerusalem, we see how David was full of joy and praise.

But David's life had not been easy. David's life was downright chaotic at times.

He was the youngest and the smallest of his family.

You who are youngest and smallest – you know how that can go, don't you?

His own father didn't even think him worthy of presenting to Samuel when he came looking for God's choice for king.

And then, when he was chosen, conflict with King Saul came quickly and severely. David lost Jonathan, his best friend, he was separated from his wife, and he wound up living a big chunk of his life on the run – always fighting, always struggling, living in caves and off of people’s good graces.

And then, when he does finally come into God’s promise and becomes king, this tragedy with the ark happens. David did not live an easy life.

But still, David chose to give God thanks. You can see it in what he says and does here...he was able to see, what chapter 15, verse 26, declares...that, **“God was clearly helping all this to happen.”**

He recognized that, though hard, disappointing things come, in reality, as verse 30 there says, **“The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.”**

David embraced the fact that, in spite of life’s difficult twists and turns, just as we saw last Sunday, verse 31 there, **“The Lord reigns...He’s the judge...the last word in all there is!”**

In that fact, he declares, starting at verse 30 there, **“the heavens and earth and oceans and fields and forests can all sing and celebrate and be at peace.”¹**

And if these parts of creation can respond this way, then how much more can you and I.

That’s why David chose to give thanks and to worship, both personally...and here at the end of chapter 16, he even organized corporate worship at the national level in response to the ark’s successful arrival.

He assigns a team of Levites...priests...to lead corporate worship through prayer, thanksgiving and praise, because, even through tragic and confusing times, he knew God was at work in his life and in his people, and he chose to respond with gratitude.

And you know, even though he made tragic mistakes, David was loved by his people, and more importantly, he was loved by God. His heritage is one of tremendous success and faith; apart from Jesus, David is the premier example of a godly person and leader, because he had a heart after God’s own.

That’s what the choice of gratitude did for David.

But then, right by his side, was David’s wife, Michal, who’s story ends so differently.

Now, there’s no doubt Michal’s life was hard too...truly chaotic and confusing at times.

As the daughter of Saul, the first king of Israel, she was given a position of great privilege and went on to marry David, the man she loved.

But she quickly found herself torn between her father and her husband.

Insanely jealous of David, King Saul tried to eliminate him. Michal saved David’s life by deceiving her father, but the result was a long separation from both men.

¹ Psalm 96, 106

And then, after being reunited with David, she earned his anger by rebuking him for what she considered “unbecoming behavior;” being inappropriately dressed and dancing before the Lord (and with all the common people) as the ark entered Jerusalem.

The last we hear of Michal are the cryptic words: ***“And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child until the day of her death.”***

Which is a way to say, “She left no lasting legacy.”

I think Michal was much like her father – she failed to notice God in her life, in both the happy and the sad happenings, because her attentions were on herself.

Some of the midrash on this passage expresses it well:

To David, Michal essentially said: “My father’s house was superior to yours. In his house, no one would reveal as much as an arm or a leg. People were dignified.”

To which David responded: “Your father’s house sought its own honor and forsook the honor of Heaven. My approach is the reverse: I forsake my own honor in favor of the honor of Heaven.”

Which is actually the very reason God deposed Saul and exalted David:

Saul was out for Saul, even at God’s expense.

But David was out for God, even at David’s expense.

Saul’s attentions were primarily turned toward himself.

David’s attentions were primarily turned toward God.

So even when he didn’t understand why things were the way they were in his life, David looked to God with gratitude and expressed that gratitude.

You see it here...you see it all through the Psalms he wrote.

And that practice not only calmed the chaos in his life, it reset his attentions. It pointed his eyes to what was really important, which realigned his attitude and reset his reality.

The choice to be thankful...the choice of gratitude...it grew David up in faith...made him a different person...and gave him a legacy that lasts through the ages – all the way to our day today.

In fact, you can see David’s mature heart for God in an event that occurred years after this.

Of course, this whole saga of the Ark began because it was taken into battle...Israel saw it as something of a lucky charm, and they subjected it to the risk of capture in order to win military victories.

But years later, Absalom, David’s own son, led a rebellion against his aging father.

To avoid a civil war and for his own safety, David was forced to flee Jerusalem. Zadok the High Priest felt that David would be safer with the Ark, and removed it from Jerusalem to accompany the king.

But David's reaction to that idea reveals his heart:

He said to Zadok, *“Return the ark of God to the city; if I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, then He will bring me back, and He will show me it, and His dwelling place. But if He says, ‘I do not want you,’ behold, here I am; let Him do to me as seems good in His eyes.”*

David felt it was his job to protect the Ark, not for the Ark to protect him. The Ark was not to be treated as a tool at his disposal.

Reverence towards God comes first; preserving the monarchy would have to take second place.

You see, David was out for God, even at the expense of David.

But sadly, the same cannot be said about Michal.

Her attention to herself...to her own place and dignity and rank grew in her a critical heart and spirit.

It grew in her loathing instead of love...for those who did not prioritize those things...even her husband.

Her attention to self precluded gratitude in her life, since she felt she had little for which to be thankful.

And so, in the end, attention to self over God gave her no legacy of faith in God's eyes and Kingdom.

And it gave her no legacy of family either.

We don't know whether Michal had no children because she was separated from David or because God prevented her from conceiving.

But either way, the consequence was: Saul's line – the line of ingratitude and putting self before God – would end, and David's line – the line of gratitude and humility before God – would carry on...and through Bathsheba, ironically, and Solomon, her son.

David's life shows us how the practice of giving thanks calms chaos because it resets our internal attentions...it puts our attention on **God** and **off of ourselves**.

Thanksgiving aligns our attitude with God's concerns and priorities.

It recalibrates our reality...reminding us of what's really important and what is not.

And ultimately, as David's life shows us, a grateful heart, over against a critical heart, gives us a legacy of faith in the God to whom we give thanks.

God does not just **enjoy** those who remember Him, although He does.

The Holy Spirit **uses** gratitude to develop and mature us.

Gratitude is God's milk and vegetables for the spirit...His vitamins for faith.

And...when practiced, it all brings order and sense to our souls.

"When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed." That's the first line from the hymn, "Count Your Blessings."

What's it mean?

Billows are strong winds and tempests are dangerous storms, so it means...when the strong winds of life toss you back and forth.

Then the second line, "When you are discouraged thinking all is lost." That's easier, right? When we are feeling down and sad and even hopeless about what's happening in life.

What are we to do?

Count our blessings...turn our attention to the good things God has done for us...which is what a blessing is.

Count them, name them, remember them each one...which takes intentionality and effort, doesn't it?

"And it will surprise you what the Lord has done."

Gratitude...the practice of giving thanks will calm the storms...the billows...the tempests and the chaos they bring, because gratitude resets our attention...

It realigns our attitude...

It recalibrates our reality.

If life is weighing heavily on you in these days, will you give it a try?

You can do it right now...on the back of the worship folder, there's a place for notes. Write down things God has done for you...breathe a prayer of thankfulness to God for each one, and see if you don't immediately begin to feel lighter, more ordered, more stable...

God will lift up the grateful heart.

Benediction: Whatever the conflict in our lives, whether great or small, we need not be discouraged - God is over all. Let's give thanks to Him for His blessings, and then watch Him calm the chaos within us.