

Introduction

1. We often hear that motives matter more than actions, and some claim that motives are the only thing that matter

Culver's employee—always seems to serve me with a smile and great attitude; this time he was quite, almost depressed looking; no smile, no thank you, super quite voice; watched him with others and saw the same; I wondered if he was okay; after lunch I approached him and said, "Are you okay? You don't seem like yourself cheery, friendly self today." He replied by rolling his eyes and saying, "Oh, give me a break!" I could see I offended him. I immediately explained that I wasn't complaining but rather concerned because he was always so friendly, always had a smile on his face, etc. After explaining, he softened and actually seemed to appreciate my concern and explained that he was simply exhausted from a long week. Apparently, my motives weren't enough in this case.

2. Motives are important, and the Bible says a lot about motives
3. However, we cannot say that motives are more important than actions, or that motives are the only thing that matters to God
4. In fact, the Bible places just as much emphasis on our behavior and actions as it does our motives, sometimes even more, especially when it comes to sin and/or disobedience
5. Today we're going to look at a perfect example when David makes an attempt to move the ark of the covenant

A. David's first attempt to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (6:1-11)

1. It seemed good to move the ark (READ 1-2):
 - a. This text doesn't tell us why David wanted to move the ark but the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 13 gives us a clue
 - 1) Back in 1 Samuel 4-6 we learned that the Philistines had captured the ark, but after being plagued by God they couldn't take it anymore and returned it to Israel
 - 2) At that time, the ark was moved to Baael-judah (Kiriath-jearim) and placed into the home of a man named Abinadab where it's been for almost a century
 - 3) There's only one other mention of the ark during that 100 years (1 Samuel 14:18) which suggests it had been neglected or somewhat forgotten by Israel
 - 4) It appears David sought to rectify this by moving the ark to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel (READ 1 Chronicles 13:1-4, esp. 3)
 - 5) Another reason may have been that the ark's current location was close to Palestinian territory (within about five miles) so it would have been safer in Jerusalem
 - b. So, David's motives in moving the ark were good; what could be wrong with that?
2. It seemed good to use a cart (READ 3-4):
 - a. The ark wasn't particularly small or light:
 - 1) It was a rectangular wooden chest overlaid with gold and measured almost 4.5 feet long, 2.5 feet wide and 2.5 feet tall

- 2) In addition, on top of the chest sat the mercy seat and two cherubim made out of hammered gold
 - 3) Estimates are that it might have weighed as much as 600 pounds, and that doesn't include the contents (stone tablets containing the Law, an urn filled with mana, and Aaron's rod—maybe another 50 pounds??)
 - 4) So, they loaded it up on a cart behind a couple of oxen with two of Abinadad's descendants, Uzzah and Ahio, at the reigns
 - 5) What better way to transport such a large, heavy object?
- b. The fact that they chose to use a "new" cart suggests a couple of things:
- 1) They understood the value of the ark and didn't want to risk an older cart collapsing under the weight
 - 2) A new cart might also suggest a sense of honor or respect for the ark, possibly recognizing it as holy (e.g. who would dare place such a holy object on a cart that had been previously used for farming purposes?)
- c. So, using not just a cart but a new cart seemed like a good idea. What could be wrong with that?
3. It seemed good to celebrate (5):
- a. Much as we might expect, moving the ark to Jerusalem was a big deal and involved a huge celebration
- 1) It began with David gathering all the leaders in Israel, 30,000 men according to verse 1, to plan the event
 - 2) Then, according to 1 Chronicles 12:2-5 they invited all the inhabitants of Israel to come celebrate with them
 - 3) It was basically a parade with music, singing, and dancing (1 Chronicles 13:8): **"David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, even with songs and with lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals and with trumpets."**
 - 4) This wasn't some low-key event, but a full-blown, massive celebration with tens—possibly hundreds—of thousands of people
- b. It was a celebration fitting such a momentous event; what could possibly be wrong with that?
4. Well, something was wrong and it had devastating consequences (READ 6-7):
- a. This catches us off guard and shocks us—why would God kill Uzzah for trying to protect the ark? What could possibly have been wrong with that?!?! Wasn't it a good thing?!?!?
- b. The problem all along was in the way that they chose to transport the ark:
- 1) The ark was not merely some religious object; it was the holiest of all objects because it represented the presence of God, and therefore was to be treated in a certain way
 - 2) The Law spelled out specific rules for transporting the ark (Numbers 4:1-20):
 - a) First, the only ones permitted to transport the holy items of the tabernacle, including the ark of the covenant, were the descendants of Kohath (one of Levi's sons).
 - b) However, prior to moving the items they had to be covered—the descendants of Aaron were given this task and they were the only ones permitted to touch or even

look at the items; the Law warned that if anyone else touched or even looked at the items—even the Kohathites—they would die (Numbers 4:18-20)

- c) When it came to the ark specifically, it could only be transported by inserting two poles into the four rings at the base, and then carried by hand on the shoulders; Exodus 25:12-14; 1 Chronicles 15:15)

3) So, there were at least two problems:

- a) They put it on a cart rather than carry it in accordance with the Law (with poles on their shoulders)
- b) Uzzah touched it, and there was no indication that he was a descendent of Aaron (the only ones allowed to touch it), a Kohathite (the only ones allowed to transport it), or even a Levite (suggested by 1 Chronicles 15:2)
- c) Basically, this was a major violation of the Law and showed a complete disregard for the sacredness and holiness of the ark (7): **“and God struck him down there for his irreverence”**

5. David’s response is a bit mixed (8-11):

- a. His first response was anger but the text is a bit vague because it simply says David was angry **“because of the LORD’S outburst against Uzzah”** (8):
 - 1) It doesn’t say whether David was mad at the LORD, Uzzah, the Levites for not following the Law, or even himself for initiating and planning the move
 - 2) It may have been a mix
- b. The second response we see is fear (9): **“So David was afraid of the LORD that day”**—this isn’t mere respect for the LORD but actual fear:
 - 1) David dismayed that he might never be able to bring the ark to Jerusalem
 - 2) He immediately stopped his plans and took the ark to the home of the nearest Levite
 - 3) It wasn’t until three months later, when he saw God bless the Levite, that he decided to make another attempt to move the ark

B. David’s second attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem (READ 6:12-19)

- 1. While this attempt resembled the first in terms of excitement and celebration, there was a key difference—they followed the Law this time:
 - a. David tasked only the Levites with preparing and carrying the ark (1 Chronicles 15:1-2)
 - b. He had the Levites consecrate themselves (1 Chronicles 15:12)
 - c. He reminded them of what happened the last time when they didn’t obey the Law (1 Chronicles 15:13-14)
 - d. They carried the ark on their shoulders with the poles (1 Chronicles 15:15)—while the text doesn’t say specifically that it was the Kohathites that carried the ark, they are mentioned in the text (v. 5) so we can safely assume it was them since everything in this passage indicates they the Law was followed carefully
 - e. The entire event seemed to have had a much more reverent air about it (e.g. they were more cautious to follow the Law, they consecrated themselves, wore their priestly garments, even David wore fine linen and an ephod, they even stopped after just the first six paces and made a burnt offering)
- 2. As a result, this time the result was drastically different:

- a. First off, they were successful
 - b. Second, the LORD was helping them (26): **“because God was helping the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams.”**
3. Not everyone was happy, however:
- a. While most of Israel was down celebrating the arrival of the ark (19), David’s wife Michal was watching from her room, and despised him (READ 16)
 - b. Then, when David returned to his home, Michal greeted him by berating him (READ 20):
 - 1) She didn’t even wait until he got into the home, but **“came out to meet”** him
 - 2) She accused him of being undignified, shameful, foolish and even accused him of **“uncovering”** (disrobing) himself in an attempt to catch the eye of his servant’s maids
 - c. David’s response is a two-fold rebuke (READ 21-22):
 - 1) He was celebrating before the LORD—the same LORD that made him king over Michal’s father and his entire household
 - 2) While the Michal as the queen might not think him distinguished, the very maids to which she referred would
 - d. In much the way that Uzzah paid a price for his irreverence, we are told that Michal paid a price as well (23): **“Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.”**

Conclusion

- 1. I don’t intend to imply that motives aren’t important because they do play a role in how we address sin, however I believe there are two take-aways from our passage today
- 2. First take away: Proper motives do not justify the means:
 - a. Just because the end result appears to honor the LORD doesn’t mean the process or the means honors Him
 - b. Taking the ark to the capital city was something that honored the LORD; the lack of reverence and using a cart to do it didn’t
 - c. Are there things we excuse about our behavior, or things we do as a Church that we overlook, simply because the end result honors the LORD?
- 3. Second take away: Proper motives do not trump obedience:
 - a. When Saul felt like he was doing the right thing by offering sacrifices to the LORD, even though it broke the Law, Samuel reminded him that the LORD desires obedience over sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22): **“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.”**
 - b. Clearly, Azzah’s honorable desire to protect the ark didn’t trump his disregard for the Law when it came to transporting or touching the ark
 - c. Are there times when we ignore or write off our own disobedience simply because we didn’t intend to sin, or because our motives were right?
- 4. In short, God desires both proper motives and obedience