

The Presence of God - Part 1

by David Ravenhill

David Ravenhill's message is about bringing back the presence of God, and the importance of seeking God's guidance and wisdom.

Duration: 29:33

Scripture: 1 Samuel 4:3, 1 Samuel 4:11, 1 Chronicles 13:3-9, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Gods Presence", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

In this sermon, David Ravenhill discusses the story of the Ark of the Covenant being captured by the Philistines and the consequences it had on the Israelites. He emphasizes the importance of seeking and honoring the presence of God in our lives. Ravenhill highlights the danger of relying on our own understanding and seeking worldly solutions instead of seeking God's guidance. He encourages the audience to learn from the mistakes of Saul and the Israelites and to prioritize the presence of God in their lives.

Transcript

David Ravenhill. It's a real joy to be with you this morning. I've told people for a number of years there's one basic difference between my father's ministry and my teaching.

That's about 45 minutes. I've had to revise that in recent years to about 30 minutes. Pretty soon we'll be neck and neck.

I appreciate the ones that were leading the singing this morning, that they were cooperative and they cut down the song service a little bit to give me a little bit more time so I won't waste that time. I'd like you to turn with me to 1 Chronicles chapter 13. If you have your notes, I believe it's page 29.

I want to speak about the presence of God and the title, Preparing for His Presence or Bringing Back the Presence of God. I was asked to send these notes about six weeks ago now and one of the dangers in sending notes ahead of time is that you're sort of bound by them when the day arrives so please give me the liberty of not necessarily covering every single verse. In fact, already this morning I found one that does not apply or seemingly got the wrong verse.

But the background to this particular portion of Scripture really is there in 1 Samuel chapter 4 where the children of Israel in a moment of desperation decided as they were fighting the Philistines that the only

way in which they were going to win the battle was to bring the Ark of the Covenant into the battle with them. They were convinced that in doing that that they would succeed in defeating the Philistines. Instead God allowed His strength, as the Bible says, to be given into captivity and the Ark of God or the Presence of God was taken by the Philistines and for seven months caused havoc throughout the land of the Philistines.

Seemingly the people broke out in hemorrhoids or tumors and the god Dagon fell down shattered in front of the Presence of God and so on. All sorts of devastation happened until finally after seven months they wised up and said let's get rid of the Ark. And they decided that the way in which they would do that they would put it on a new cart and send it back and I'm sure many of you know the story.

And it says that when they sent the Ark back that it was placed in the house of Abinadab for something like twenty years. In fact, if you study the record a little more closely than that that was the initial period of time and then there was a forty year period of time after that in which the Ark of God was in the house of Abinadab. Something like sixty years when Israel was without the Presence of God.

Sixty years in which the tabernacle never had the Presence of God in it. One entire generation and a half that missed out if you like on the Presence of God. And David in 1 Chronicles chapter 13 verse 3 after he comes to the throne he makes the statement, Let us bring back the Ark of God to us for we did not seek it all the days of Saul.

Mike Bickle who I have now had the privilege of working with for almost a year has a little phrase about your secret history in God. I wrote down that Saul's secret history in God or I should say without God is summed up there in that portion of Scripture. That forty years in which Saul reigned over Israel and never once did he seek the Presence of God.

Never once did he inquire apart from when it was too late did he ever really inquire of God. What a tragedy. I think there is a parallel in this portion of Scripture and it's the reason I'm giving it today as to what God is doing in the Church.

I believe that Saul's reign is over. Saul who was self-sufficient and independent of God who never inquired of God. He reminds me of the verse of Scripture there in Ecclesiastes talks about the old and the foolish king who no longer knew how to receive instruction.

Nobody could teach him. Samuel the prophet went to him. He refused to listen.

And again his life is summarized in that verse there. We did not seek it all the days of Saul. I think Saul himself summarizes his own life even better where he says I've erred exceedingly and I've played the fool.

That was the summation of his life by his own confession at the end of his life. I've erred exceedingly. I've played the fool.

I think that again this generation spiritually speaking now really could sum up what we have accomplished in the last 40 years with those same words. We've erred exceedingly. We've played the fool.

We've depended on man's methods and man's ways of doing things and as a result we've produced absolutely nothing. But David was a different man. David was from a different order.

David had different longings and different desires. And David as it says there in your notes had all the way through the Psalms has this expression of his immense longing and desire after God. Psalm 42 where he says as a heart panteth after the water brooks so panteth my soul after the oil.

David's supreme longing was to bring back the presence of God. Psalm 132. Again verses 2 to 5 there where he says that I will not enter my house I will not lie on my bed I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids until I find a place for the Lord a dwelling place for the mighty one of Jacob.

Notice the intensity of that statement. David says I'll not rest I'll not slumber I'll not settle down until I restore God back to his rightful place in the center of if you like the Old Testament church. He realized there was a dimension that was missing.

And he realized as he became king that he could not operate as king unless the presence of God was part of his life. Unless the presence of God was once again reinstated into the center of the nation of Israel. You recall it was Jesus who borrowed the statement from David.

There in Psalm 69 where he says zeal for thy house has consumed me. David again was the one that originally if you like coined that expression. Such was his longing zeal for thy house it's consumed me.

David was consumed. He had one supreme longing one supreme desire and that was to know God intimately. And so he decides that he will bring back the presence of God.

You notice the decision came after the statement there in verse 40 of 1 Chronicles chapter 12 where it says that they had had a tremendous time of feasting. It says there are great quantities of flour cakes and pig cakes and bunches of raisins wine and oil and oxen and sheep and there was joy indeed in Israel. And then verse 13 David consulted with the captains captains of thousands and hundreds even with every leader.

And he gathers his men together after this time of celebration and he says listen it seems good to me and I trust it seems good to you why don't we bring back the presence of God after all for 60 years it's been in the house of Abinadad. For 60 years it's been in a place of obscurity. For 60 years the average individual in Israel has never seen or sensed the presence of God.

Why don't we bring it back and they agree that that's the right thing to do. Now let me say this about the ark and again you have the scriptures there but in Exodus chapter 25 and verse 22 when Moses made the ark according to the divine pattern God said that it was the place where he would meet with his people. It was a place where he would commune with them.

It was a place where he would speak to them. It was a place where he would dwell. God was not in the box or in the ark he dwelt between the cherubim.

The only thing that was in the ark if you recall was the law and then Aaron's rod that budded and then a portion of the manna that the children of Israel ate during the wandering in the wilderness. I believe those three things if you like symbolize the Godhead the law representing the Father and by law I don't use that in a negative sense. James says it's the perfect law of liberty.

I think we've sometimes got a wrong conception about God's law. And then there was the rod that budded symbolizing the Spirit of God the anointing, the authority and then the bread again symbolizing the Son of God I am the bread of life. But God said I will dwell there where the ark is.

I will come to you I'll commune with you I'll speak with you. It was called the meeting place and David says that's what we need. We need a place of communion.

We need a place of intimacy. We need to hear once again the mind of God the voice of God. So let's bring back the ark of God.

David was not simply speaking about a little box about two and a half feet long. He was speaking about bringing back God's presence. And so he sets apart to do that.

And again in your notes if you are following along David's motivation and let me say this right from the very beginning I believe that David's motivation was right. I believe his desires were right his motives were pure. I don't believe there was any sense in which David wanted to make a name for himself.

I believe that David honestly longed again for God's presence. But David made a wrong assumption. And the wrong assumption was this that just because my motivation is right therefore my methods must be right.

And I think maybe that's one of the greatest problems in the church of Jesus Christ today that we've assumed because our motivation is right that therefore our methodology also must be right. And God had to teach David a very costly lesson as we go through this portion of scripture. You notice he consulted everybody but God.

Very easy isn't it to sort of compare ourselves among ourselves. Paul writing to the Corinthians says if we compare ourselves among ourselves we're not wise. I remember hearing a number of years ago about a watchmaker who set up his practice in a small town and the main industry in that town was some sort of a paper mill.

And 80% of the men were employed in this particular mill. The watchmaker after he had set up his little store he noticed that every single morning without exception a gentleman came by looked in the window took out his watch adjusted it very carefully to the clock that he had in the window and went on his way. And this went on week after week after week and finally out of curiosity one morning he stopped the man and he said to him he said listen I'm the watchmaker I own this shop and out of curiosity he said I've noticed that you know every morning you come by you take your watch out you adjust it he said I just wonder who are you and so on.

And the man said well you see I'm the foreman down at the mill and it's my responsibility every morning to or every lunch time to blow the whistle. And the whistle of course not only signifies that it's 12 o'clock time for the men to take a break for lunch but he says also it's amazing how many people in this village set their watch and their clocks by my whistle. And so he said I need to have the right time.

The watchmaker sort of chuckled and looked at him he said you know for the last three months ever since opening this shop I've been setting my clock according to your whistle. And I think many times spiritually we do the same thing. We compare ourselves among ourselves and we're not very wise.

David again consulted with thousands of the captains of thousands and hundreds and hundreds and so on. The end result being that he lacked wisdom. The one individual if you like the one person that he should have consulted and prayed to was God himself.

But he failed to do that. And therefore consequently the thing came to a place of disaster. David's restoration David's restoration again his desire was to bring back the ark of God.

Notice in verse 6 it says and David and all Israel went up to Bala that is to Kirith-Jerim which belongs to Judah to bring up from there the ark of God the Lord who is enthroned above the cherubim where his name is called. You see it was not simply the ark again that David was after but it says the Lord the ark of God the Lord who is enthroned above the cherubim. That's what David was longing for.

David wanted to see restored again to Israel to his own life individually the presence of God. And so he sets apart about doing this. You notice it says in verse 7 and they carried the ark of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab and Uzzah and Ahau drove the cart.

I think there's been a lot of confusion over this verse in verse 7. I've heard it said many many times that the way in which David decided to bring back the presence of God was the way in which the Philistines did it. In other words David relied upon the method of the world. He took the same method that the Philistines used and therefore he was he met with disaster.

Well the end of that is true he did meet with disaster but I do not believe that he was copying the way in which the world did it. Rather I believe the world was attempting to copy the way in which God ordained at least to their understanding the way in which the ark was to be transported. Let me show you that if you turn to Numbers chapter 7 before we do that let's go to 1 Samuel chapter 6 1 Samuel chapter 6 gives us the details of the Philistines bringing back the ark or sending back the ark and in verse 2 it says the Philistines call for the priests and the diviners saying what shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us how we shall send it to its place.

Now prior to this in verse 11 of the previous chapter you'll notice that they had all sorts of problems with the ark. There was disaster on every single hand it says the latter part of that verse for there was deadly confusion throughout the city. The hand of God was very heavy there.

And the Philistines realized that listen we cannot afford to make another mistake. Every time we've moved the ark every time we've handled the ark God has come down and there's been confusion there's been a sort of a heavy hand of God resting upon us. And therefore what they did if you like they inquired of their gods.

Verse 2 it says they called for the priests and the diviners and they said listen you inquire you find out how we get rid of the ark. We don't want to make any more mistakes. And you'll notice that the diviners and the priests and the religious men of the Philistine camp if you like they get their heads together they do a little bit of research and in verse 7 when we have the result of that it says now therefore take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows on which there has never been a yoke and hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves away and take the ark of the Lord and place it on the cart and put the articles of gold which you shall return to him as a guilt offering in a box by its side and then send it away that it may go.

Now why was it that they came up with that particular method? Why was it that they said listen this is the way to do it you need a brand new cart make that brand new cart set the ark of God on it put some oxen in front of it and send it on its way that's the way to get rid of it. You see I believe that as the Bible says the children of this age are wiser many times than the children of light. I believe that they had one desire and that was to make sure that well listen we don't have any more problems we need to handle this thing correctly.

Why do I say that? Because if you turn over to the book of Numbers Numbers chapter 7 we have this background to the transportation of the tabernacle. In verse 3 it says when they brought their offerings before the Lord six covered carts and twelve oxen a cart for every two of the leaders and an ox for each one and they presented them before the tabernacle and the Lord spoke to Moses saying accept these things from them that they may be used in the service of the Tent of Meeting and you shall give them to the Levites to each man according to his service. So Moses took the carts and the oxen and he gave them to the Levites.

It says four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari according to their service under the direction of Ithamah the son of Aaron the priest. Verse 9 but he did not give any to the sons of Kohath because theirs was the service of the holy objects which they carried on their shoulder. Now notice the Philistines didn't quite get the method correct but they did find out this they did their research and they said listen one of the ways in which the various articles are transported they always transport them on brand new carts and if we are going to return the presence of God we better make sure we do it according to God's method.

Now the only thing that was not transported on a cart was the ark of God that's where they failed but I do not believe in that sense that David you know was copying the world's way of doing it. I believe that the world in a sense was trying to be so close to God's way as they possibly could because they knew if they didn't do it that way it would meet with failure. Would to God that the church was that determined to follow the ways of God that even though we may err at least we say God we need to seek you we need your mind we need your direction we need to do it according to the understanding of your word and so David decides that he will take back the ark of God and put it again on a new cart.

If we go back into 1 Chronicles chapter 13 you notice that God said to Moses that the ark could not be transported any other way than on the shoulders of the priests those that were consecrated those that were set apart.

I believe that is true I believe that what God is looking for today is no longer methods He's looking for men He's looking for God ordained God appointed men God men that are being consecrated by the spirit of God men that are being separated unto God unto the purpose of God as I read through the word of God I find invariably that God is looking for men He looked for a man to stand amongst them there was a man sent from God whose name was John look out from among you seven men full of faith and of a good report and so on and so forth God never uses methods I believe what God is doing in these days He is raising up a new generation Paul Cain calls it the new breed but He's looking for men that can carry the presence of God He's done with sort of methodology we love to rely don't we on sort

of new cards I remember preaching once on this particular message and somebody came up to me afterwards and he said you know what a new card is made of it's made up of big wheels and boards and I think most churches have got new cards don't they they're sort of governed by big wheels and boards that tell them exactly what to do and how to operate and so on and the methodology to use and so on and God is saying listen get rid of the big wheels and boards if you can't get rid of them get out from among them start something else but God is saying listen my presence does not rest on methods it rests on men it rests on men that are consecrated it rests on men that are separated it rests on men that have had the blood applied to their ear to their thumb to their toe they've got a separated

hearing a separated service a separated walk they know what it is to seek me they know what it is and know my mind and know my will and so David again makes this mistake his motivation again is right there is nothing wrong with his motivation his methods are drastically wrong and so he seeks to bring back again the the ark of God and he says in verse 8 and David and all Israel were celebrating before the Lord with all their might even with songs and with lyres with harps and tambourines and cymbals and with trumpets and notice the celebration was genuine I don't think there is any question if you are to look into this that they really did have the presence of God in other words the ark that they were transporting really was the genuine article it really was God's presence and therefore

associated with that presence there was tremendous celebration David was dancing the people were spinning around if you like there was great music there was great celebration there was tremendous energy being extended because the presence of God was there and I believe in a sense that you know over the last number of years as being in the church of Jesus Christ a restoration if you like or at least a renewal in the realm of celebration we have come into a dimension of praise and worship we have come into a new dimension of songs to the Lord and so on and I believe that God has inhabited many times the presence of praises of His people I believe that God has come down we have honestly been able to say God was in the meeting tonight or God was in the meeting this morning because the

presence of God was there in other words even though our methods were wrong God at least for a period of time sanctioned what we were doing and so the same thing is true of David even though he is using the wrong method God's presence nevertheless is resting on the cart I think we also need to see that celebration and liberty are not always a sign of God's approval I think many times we judge a meeting according to the freedom in the atmosphere according to the amount of noise that we make and so on and so forth here was tremendous noise tremendous celebration but it was not necessary it was not met necessarily with God's approval and God had to teach David a very real lesson in the midst of this if you are following along in your notes at number five David's correction because you will

notice something it says there in verse eight or verse nine when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon it has always amazed me as I have read this portion of scripture that when they came to possibly the most level portion of ground on their whole pilgrimage and I am not sure how many miles it was but when they came to a threshing floor suddenly the oxen began to unsteady the ark I don't believe it was the oxen I believe God was in control I believe God was trying to teach David one of his spiritual leaders or the spiritual leader at the time he was trying to teach him a divine object lesson why did it happen at the threshing floor again the threshing floor in the natural is a very level place you don't thresh wheat on a place where there is all sorts of rough terrain you don't

thresh where there is all sorts of boulders and rocks and so on and so forth because obviously you would lose all the grain down there it would be impossible to reap your harvest you find a place that is as level and smooth possibly some great big huge rock or something and that's the place where you do your threshing and yet of all the places on that trip as they came no doubt over all sorts of rocks and rough roads and we need to understand they didn't have the highways that we do that everything went smoothly until they came to the threshing floor and then suddenly everything went wrong and as he puts forth his hand to steady the ark and suddenly God destroys him I'm convinced as we look at this as a parallel of what is happening today that the church of Jesus Christ today is at the

threshing floor there is no question in my mind that this is where we are at in God's time table this is where we are at in God's program the church of Jesus Christ right now is going through a time if you like where

things seem to be shaking where God is doing a work of divine threshing you see the threshing floor is a place of separation the threshing floor is a place where He separates the wheat from the chaff where He rids one of the other and I believe we are seeing that in the church of Jesus Christ today in 1 Chronicles chapter 21 David has been moved upon to number Israel what he did was he took a census find out how many people there were in Israel you wonder why God judged him 70,000 men died as a result of that decision why was God so angry what was David doing he simply called

his men together and said I want to know how many men there are in Israel but you see he wasn't interested in how many twins had been born he wasn't interested in how many people he had over the age of 50 he wasn't interested in how many marriages had taken place David had one specific thing in mind when he numbered Israel that was how many men I can rely on in time of need he wanted to know how many men he could rely on how many soldiers how many men that could draw the sword and the reason that God judged David so severely there in verse 14 when 70,000 men died was because David was beginning to rely on the arm of flesh David was saying listen how strong am I how self sufficient am I I don't really need God I've got so many men in fact when Joab was there when he brought back the report

there was over a million or one and a half million men that were able to go out to battle and David again immediately felt listen I'm secure nobody can defeat me I've got so many men to rely upon somebody said that David's sin of passion with Bathsheba cost him one life David's sin of pride cost him 70,000 lives I think so often when we talk about David's greatest sin immediately we go to Bathsheba and we think you know that was the greatest sin in the life of David I don't believe that and by saying that I'm not belittling in any way that area of immorality God does not condone that but God took away the life of that child that was born out of that union with Bathsheba but when David had pride in his life God took away 70,000 of his choicest men He says if you're going to rely on them

I'm going to deplete them I'm going to make you rely upon me David is able to say later on in the Psalms some trust in chariots and some in horses but we will remember what the name of the Lord our God but it was on that occasion that David comes and in order to stay the hand of God he is told to make a sacrifice and he goes to the threshing floor you recall that when he got there that Ornan said to him listen I'll give it to you it's yours and he said God forbid that I should offer to God that which costs me nothing and he makes a sacrifice to God and the the angel lord puts his sword back in his sheath and the plague is stayed and as David is standing there on that threshing floor notice what he does there in 1 Chronicles chapter 22 and verse 1 and David said this is the house of the

Lord God and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel suddenly as he is standing there on that threshing floor there is a sort of prophetic mantle if you like that comes upon him divine revelation is given to him and as he stands on the threshing floor he says this is God's house now there was nothing there there were no buildings there there was no outer court a holy place a holy of holies it was simply a barren place it was a threshing floor belonging to a farmer out in his field somewhere but David suddenly by the spirit of God he says this is God's house in other words David understood by divine inspiration that the foundation of God's house is a threshing floor it's a place of separation the ecclesia the called out ones the separated ones he says it's on that sort of a rock

that I'll build my church you notice you go over into 2 Chronicles and chapter 3 verse 1 and Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah where the Lord had appeared to his father David at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebuzite

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