

## 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12-19 When Things Go Right

The story of Israel is told from the perspective of people who knew the ending. We also know the ending. Keep in mind that in the end things did not go well, and this is okay for us to say, because at one time or another for each of us things do not go so well. And this is true for every civilization and for every person.

Israel began as a loose association of tribal people living under the power of the powerful Egyptian state more than 3,000 years ago. The beginnings of the story recount how they sojourned in Egypt and were eventually forced into labor there and finally delivered in the account we know as the Exodus.

They came back to Canaan and established themselves as a collection of tribes. Then they wanted a stronger federal government and asked for and were given a king. The first king's name was Saul, and he did not work out so well.

Then David came along and things got better. Beginning with his defeat of Goliath, David led Israel to victories paving the way for the establishment of a modest empire which reached its zenith sometime in the reign of David's son Solomon. After that the decline and fall of their civilization came.

In the meantime came the golden age when Israelite civilization flourished. They built their cities and their

religion and arts developed and things economic and political went well.

Our story today reflects a part of that flourishing. David was involved in building projects; the City of David, and he dreamed of a permanent temple to symbolize God's home, a dream that would be realized under Solomon. At this point no one could foresee the tragic ending to things. What does one do when things go right?

### Murphy's Law

I am sure that you have heard of Murphy's Law, which states that if anything *can* go wrong, sooner or later it will. I researched the origin of this statement and the idea behind it only to find confusion. It does not seem scientific, only a frustrating observation made by those trying to accomplish something and not succeeding.

One of the questions about Murphy's law is whether it should be attributed to someone named Murphy, who turns out to have been an engineer working in the space program in the 1950s. The idea had been expressed before, but he made a statement that linked his name to it and it stuck.

The other question regards whether it is a law. It is likely that it derives its power not from some kind of scientific accuracy as from the human tendency to focus on the negative and complain when things are out of sorts.

Actually it is a variation on a more general axiom, “If anything can happen, sooner or later it will,” which means, “if anything can go right, sooner or later it will.”

Things went right when David was able to establish Jerusalem as his capital and he was able to bring the Ark of the Covenant into the place that he had set up for it there. Ever since, Jerusalem has been an important center of the spiritual life of the human race, as it is today. What does one do when things go well? David led the Israelites in a great celebration.

## Statements

I am not sure what scientists would say, all I know is that in Christian theology, some statements can be made.

1 - Evil is real and necessary because of sin. Perhaps it was not necessary before sin happened but sin did happen, and now reality has been shaped by it; something *has* gone wrong, horribly wrong, from both a practical *and* a moral perspective.

2 - Under the circumstances, goodness is not necessary; we are not owed any of the positive, happy, useful, pleasurable events in life. Sin means disaster. The presence of good is not necessary. If it wasn't for God's grace, there would be no goodness.

There does not have to be sunshine and laughter and cool breezes at the end of the day; we are not guaranteed beauty and love and friendship; nor justice, well-being, and peace. But we do know them, and not primarily as ideas we hope for but as experiences we have had.

3 - Goodness is real! All good things come from God and are given to us as gifts. Every good thing that happens points to salvation. Our theology tells us this and also tells us that gratitude is the right attitude of mind and heart to meet this reality. Sometimes celebrations are warranted just to acknowledge God's goodness.

## Excess

By that I don't mean our little celebrations that we have on the down-low. I mean the kind France and Croatia had when they made the World Cup final, and one of these nations will have this evening, with screaming and tears and dancing in the streets.

I have to admit the difficulty of letting myself go like that, like David in his linen ephod dancing in the streets of his city to the disapproving glances of his wife, who could not bring herself to such joyous expression.

## The Ending

The people who gave us this story under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, knew about the ending of it all; they knew that after the reign of David would come the time of Solomon, who would be very severe. And they knew that after Solomon the kingdom would split, be torn asunder, and that both the Northern and the Southern remnants of David's domain would fall into decline and be conquered.

They knew, as we do, that the celebration of David's bringing of the Ark into Jerusalem was not permanent, but very temporary. One wonders why they wrote the story.

From the divine perspective the reason the story is told is to help us understand what it means to be human and live under the curse *and* to understand God's nature, what it means to live under grace. Those who gave these stories to posterity were telling of their hard won discoveries about human nature and divine will.

One thing is clear, that all of the good things that happen in the biblical story; creation, the deliverance of Noah's family in the time of the flood and of Joseph's brothers during the famine, the Exodus from Egypt, the rise of the Israelite monarchy, the story we have read today, the birth of Jesus, all the healings and miracles, are also not permanent, but temporary, and their celebrations came to an end.

They point beyond themselves to something greater, something that is permanent, to the eternal victory over sin and death and emptiness. It is because they point to the larger victory that they are to be celebrated.

The same may be said of all the good things that happen to human beings, no matter how small or temporary they may be. Try an experiment, have a small celebration every time something good happens:

When a child is born

When a soccer team is rescued from a cave

Each time there is a beautiful sunset or the flowers bloom or when the doctor says the test have come in negative, fireflies, puppies, you fill in the blank.

They are gifts from God that point to our salvation and the salvation of the world. Take joy in them, celebrate them. If you can't dance like David did, then at least smile at the spectacle in your mind's eye of him dancing, at the spectacle of the great triumph to which all this goodness points.

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