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## SEND IN THE CLOWNS 2 Samuel 6:12-23

Back in 2005 actor Tom Cruise appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show and had a memorable moment that went viral on the Internet and is still rather notorious. He got so enthusiastic in proclaiming his love for then girlfriend Katie Holmes that he started jumping up and down on a couch much to the surprise of the host of the show and the amusement of millions of people. He became the subject of a lot of ridicule, because his behavior was ridiculous. And obviously he didn't love her nearly as much as he seemed to think he did because they are now divorced.

The whole thing seemed kind of silly, but I occasionally think of that incident. The question it raises in my mind is what is there in your life that would make you so excited, so joyful that you would jump up and down to proclaim it? What is there in life that fills you with so much enthusiasm that you don't care what people think of your expression of joy about it? Wouldn't it be better to have some things in life that we are that enthusiastic about than to blandly go through life in neutral? Today in our study of the life of David we are going to see him do something that to some seemed as idiotic as Tom Cruise's little episode. This incident will teach us something about how we can have more joy and enthusiasm in our lives. We will see this incident in 2 Samuel 6:12-23.

### DAVID CELEBRATED THE RETURN OF THE ARK

After the disaster of Uzzah's death in the first half of this chapter David made sure when he felt it was safe to bring the ark to Jerusalem to do it the right way. He had the divinely designated Levites transport it properly. Rather than using standard shipping they were to send it overnight by FedEx. Oh wait, no, that's not right. The usual way to move objects in that day was to put them on a cart drawn by animals. But that's what they had done before, with disastrous results. The proper way was for the Levites to put poles through the rings on the corners of the box and carry it using those poles.

But David wanted to be extra careful. So after only taking 6 steps he had the transporters stop. He sacrificed a bull and a calf to God there. This was not ordered by God. David recognized that Uzzah had died because he had failed to regard God as holy. David was making sacrifices as a way of acknowledging his and his people's guilt and their need for forgiveness from a holy God. In effect it was a way of appealing to God to forgive them if they had done anything improperly in

transporting the ark. It was an over the top way of trying to make the process safe. It has been estimated that it was a 6 mile trip to Jerusalem. It is not clear from the text if David had them offer a sacrifice just once, or if they did it every 6 steps. If they had to stop every 6 steps and make sacrifices that must have been a long trip.

David took off his royal robe and stripped down to a linen ephod. So preparing to dance David got his ephod on. The difficulty I have with this is, what's an ephod? Does it have something to do with the Internet, like an e-magazine or an e-business? Is it like an early form of the I-Pod, so maybe David had his earbuds in to dance with? No, it was an article of clothing. Still not helping. I have never worn, owned or to my knowledge even seen an ephod, so what is it? From the research I did it appears that there were two kinds of ephods, one of which was a ceremonial ornamented vest-like affair to be worn by the chief priest. But it also appears that there was another form that was an ordinary garment that might have been worn under a robe. So it's kind of like David stripped down to a T-shirt and some shorts and began dancing in celebration of the occasion of the ark coming to Jerusalem. I think David wanted to humble himself. He wanted to be just humble David before the presence of God with none of the trappings of royalty. Being the king meant nothing in the presence of God, and he was acknowledging that. David wanted the attention not to be on him as the king, but on the Lord and his presence.

The Hebrew word translated "dance" here literally meant "to whirl." David was not doing a sedate waltz when he danced. He was whirling around. The Hebrew verb is an intensive verb. The Hebrew language had a form of verb that intensified the meaning, and that is the form of this verb. Literally it meant that David intensely whirled, or as we might put it today he whirled to the max. You get the idea in verse 16 where it says that Michal, David's wife, saw him "leaping and dancing." Again the word for leaping was an intensive. The Hebrew word translated "leap" in English would be written *pazaz*. So we could say David was showing pizzazz.

The point is that David was flying around in reckless, joyous abandon, leaping and spinning to the max. I don't know what it says about me that the picture that this brings into my mind is Snoopy from the old *Peanuts* cartoon. In one strip Snoopy is whirling to the max and Lucy says to him, "I don't understand you. The whole world is coming apart and you're dancing." Snoopy just keeps dancing and is depicted thinking, "I can't help it. My feet love to dance, and I have an obligation to my feet." David didn't have an obligation to his feet I guess, but he had unbounded joy in the presence of God. He had an obligation to his joy to let it out.

David was serious about this celebration. He organized what amounted to a parade to bring the ark to Jerusalem. Verse 15 says he and “all Israel” brought the ark to Jerusalem, so there was a huge crowd, and they did so with shouts and the sounds of trumpets. They had a marching band apparently. It appears that he leapt and whirled to the max the entire parade route, which meant he danced the whole 6 mile march.

Once they finally arrived in Jerusalem David wasn’t done celebrating. Verse 19 tells us he gave a loaf of bread and cakes of raisins and dates to every member of the crowd. Wait he gave them fruitcakes? Yeah, that must have been a real party. It wasn’t often that a king just handed out free food to everybody. He wanted people to be happy and to experience the joy of this great festive occasion.

David was so excited about bringing the ark to Jerusalem because he understood the ark represented God’s presence with all the power and blessing that brings, so bringing it to the new capital city was cause for great joy. David was excited and wanted to celebrate because it meant that God was with the people of Israel. He loved God more than anything and he could not contain his joy in celebrating God’s presence.

#### MICHAL WAS DISGUSTED BY HER HUSBAND

Michal, David’s wife, didn’t quite catch the spirit of the thing. She saw her husband, the king of Israel, the man who replaced her father, come into town leaping and spinning like a mad man, all in his Under Armour, out there for everybody to see. Verse 16 says she “despised him in her heart.”

She was disgusted by the behavior of her husband. May I see a show of hands of all the wives out there who know what Michal was feeling? I feel bad for you women. You get to be married to men, for whom the term “grow up” can only be loosely applied at times. My wife has had to put up with going to softball games and hockey games that her husband has been playing in as though it was the World Series or the Stanley Cup playoffs. She has had to bear up while her husband got all tied up in knots when he was watching our son playing high school football. She still shakes her head in dismay as her husband yells at the television when the Chargers pull their usual stunts. I am sure she despairs that her husband will ever get a clue. What is the difference between government bonds and men? Government bonds mature.

Let me just point out that I’ve never danced in public with reckless abandon and certainly have never done so in my underwear, so it seems to me that I’m at least

ahead on points over David. Michal was thoroughly disgusted. She felt her husband should behave like a king, not like some foolish idiot. Hey, if he's going to be the king of the entire nation is it too much to ask that he behave with some dignity? I mean, come on, couldn't he at least keep his clothes on?

I find her comments about David to be personally offensive. That's because she accused him in verse 20 of behaving as any "vulgar fellow" would. The reason this offends me is the Hebrew word translated "vulgar fellow" is "*rik*." I do not appreciate her saying that it is a bad thing to go around like any Rick.

Michal was doing a slow burn. Most husbands have seen that look on their wives faces and know that they've blown it somehow. They may not have a clue what they've done wrong, but they know when they get home they're going to hear all about it. Well David heard all about it. Michal let him have it with both barrels. In verse 20 she said to him, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would." Can you hear the sarcasm in that comment? She ladled it into her tone liberally. Laurie occasionally expresses amazement at my exuberance. For instance, when we're eating pancakes she is usually astounded at the amount of syrup I use. I drench every millimeter in syrup. Well Michal drenched her comments with sarcasm more liberally than I use syrup. Her words are just dripping with it. Pouring on the sarcasm very effectively communicates contempt, and Michal was loaded with contempt for David.

John Gottman, the influential University of Washington psychologist and researcher, has identified 4 behaviors in couples that are predictive of future divorce. They are criticism of a spouse's personality, contempt, defensiveness and emotional withdrawal. Michal nailed 2 of the 4 in this one incident. Gottman says the most toxic and deadly of the bunch is contempt, and Michal expressed that to the max.

David defended himself. This is a classic married conflict. David fired back, essentially saying, "Oh, so I'm vulgar. Well we can't have that, can we? We surely wouldn't want to embarrass the daughter of the great nut job, Saul. I seem to recall him taking all his clothes off and lying in the street prophesying naked all day. That wasn't embarrassing, was it? He was oh so dignified. And oh by the way, the Almighty God rejected your father and everyone from your family and chose me to be the king instead. So put that on your plate and eat it."

That response may not have been David at his best. However, he did say something that was worthy of him. He said it was before the Lord that he celebrated. And he would continue to celebrate before the Lord. He said, “I will become even more undignified than this.” I’m pretty sure he stressed the word “undignified” with that same sarcastic tone Michal used. Then he said, “I will be humiliated in my own eyes.” What he was saying was that he didn’t care even a little how he looked or what people, including Michal, thought of him. What mattered was celebrating before the Lord, and nothing else. David chose to focus on doing his utmost to celebrate God and deliberately opted to disregard how he might look or what anyone else might think.

## IMPLICATIONS

David and Michal represent two radically different approaches to life. These two approaches have very different results.

## DAVID LIVED TO CELEBRATE THE LORD

We have seen before that the driving force in David’s life was his awe of God and his desire to honor and serve him. Psalm 34:1 says, “I will extol the Lord at all times, his praise will always be on my lips.” The heading to that Psalm is worth noting. It says David wrote that Psalm “when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech.” That was one of the lowest points of David’s life. He had failed to trust God, panicked and lied to a good man because he needed some help. His lie resulted in that good man’s death along with the deaths of everyone in his town. David then ran away to enemy territory and the only way he could save himself was by pretending to be loony tunes. To say it was humiliating would be a large understatement. In that context, having failed, feeling awful guilt, being disgraced, David wrote, “I will extol the Lord at all times.”

There is a really powerful statement in that Psalm in verse 5. “Those who look to him (to God) are radiant.” Radiant is a powerful word. It is larger than merely happy. To be radiant is literally to radiate or emit joy. How often in your life have you been radiant? Just over a year ago we got a call from Toby and Anna informing us that they were heading to the hospital because Anna was in labor. We didn’t get much sleep that night. What a joy it was when we got the word early the next morning that the baby formerly known as Leilani had been born. That day we went to visit at the hospital and held our granddaughter for the first time. We were radiant. Radiant means we couldn’t stop smiling. Many of the same stresses in life that had been there the day before were still there, but they just didn’t seem that important. Something much more significant and much more joyful had happened. It was so joyful that it eclipsed all the stress of life.

David knew from personal experience that looking to God and celebrating him makes us radiant. In Psalm 16:11 he wrote to God “you fill me with joy in your presence.” Being in the presence of God didn’t just help a little. It filled him with joy. It wasn’t just a small dose of joy. He was filled with joy. He had gone through the depths of life, through times of fear, loss, and humiliation and learned he could still be radiant. The day he brought the ark to Jerusalem was certainly an example of being radiant. In verse 12 it says that David went to get the ark from the house of Obed Edom “with rejoicing.” The Hebrew word translated “rejoice” literally meant “to light up the eyes.” The word spoke of great joy, the kind of joy that breaks out into laughter.

The Bible is quite insistent that there is joy to be found in the Lord. 1 Chronicles 16:27 says, “splendor and majesty are before him, joy and strength are in his dwelling place.” Proverbs 10:28 says the prospect of the righteous is joy. Isaiah 12:3 says, “with joy you will draw water from the well of salvation.” In John 15:11 Jesus said, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” Romans 14:17 says the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The key here is that David’s joy didn’t stem merely from having life finally go his way. Think about what the ark represented. What made David uniquely suited to be the king of Israel? It was one thing. God had chosen him to be king and God was with him. Take away either of those truths and David is just a young guy who used to be a shepherd. More to the point, what made Israel unique? Was it that they were bigger or stronger than other nations? Were they smarter than other people or did they have superior technology? Were they just better human beings? No, none of those things made them the unique people they were. What made them unique was that God was with them. Bringing the ark to Jerusalem was a reminder that this is who they were. This was their identity. God was present with them, and that changed everything. Israel inevitably got into trouble every time they forgot that their essential identity was the people who were in a covenant with God, the people whom God chose to dwell with. David himself made egregious errors every time he forgot that God was with him, and when he remembered that truth and counted on it, he did great things.

David had reason to rejoice, and the reason was that God was with them, symbolized by the ark being among them. That one truth was more important than anything else about him or about them as a nation. David had just been given a

reminder that when God is with you, blessing occurs, so God being with them meant there is cause for rejoicing.

In her book, *You Bring The Confetti*, Luci Swindoll tells the story of a day she was just out of sorts. It was a dreary, rainy day. It was cold. Life had been perversely difficult and she was down, and to add to the misery she was driving to an unfamiliar address and had gotten lost. This was before the advent of GPS directions on smart phones. She was fretting about several problems and struggling. At that point, in addition to praying that she could find the place she was looking for she asked God to give her something to lift her spirit. She just asked for something to cheer her up and remind her that he was with her. It didn't have to be flashy. Immediately she came to an intersection and stopped at the red light. She looked to her left, and saw that in the cab of the pickup truck next to her sat two clowns. They were decked out in full clown, with red yarn hair, big bow ties, garishly colorful oversized clothes, painted faces, big bulb noses and each was holding a helium balloon. Both of them simultaneously turned, looked at her and flashed ear to ear grins. She laughed out loud and said, "What a great idea, Lord! Who would have thought of two clowns in a pickup truck?" Her spirits immediately lifted. God had heard her, and let her know he was with her. The fact that God was with her changed her whole spirit. Whatever else was going on, she'd get through it because God was with her. The rest of that day every time she thought of those two clowns she smiled and said, "Thank you, Lord."

When life hands you lemons, make lemonade. I don't enjoy smiley face sayings like that, even if it is true that life is more about how we respond to it than it is about the hardships themselves. It's just that when you've been punched in the face by life, you're bleeding all over the place, you go down in pain and while you're on the ground life kicks you in the most vulnerable spot, saying "make lemonade" doesn't help very much. In fact, it's aggravating. Laurie has recently been talking to a young woman who is a good friend of our daughter, Carissa. She and her husband have been through every parent's nightmare this year, of suffering the death of their first child. They are followers of Jesus and at first their faith has gotten them through so far. But now, months later the pain hasn't gone away. It is a pain so deep and strong that she doesn't know how she can survive it. She has never experienced anything like this pain, and never even imagined that it existed. Making lemonade is not going to fix this.

Laurie and I have been there. We've walked that dark road. What we learned is that though it doesn't take the pain away, though one doesn't start laughing immediately, there is a deep joy and peace one can find even on that terrible path.

It comes from knowing that God is with you and in rejoicing in that. For me it came through seeing that life is, at its core, tragic, but that if God is with us then there is hope, life and joy even in the middle of the tragedy. In fact, it is ONLY in the fact that God is with us that we can experience hope and joy. Everything else we try will only be at best a brief distraction or an effort to anesthetize the pain, at least for a time.

When we gather on Sundays, this should not be the solemn, somber experience church so often seems to be. It should be a rollicking, raucous, shout to the Lord, a whirl and dance in the aisles celebration that God is with us.

#### MICHAL MADE LIFE ABOUT HERSELF

So what's the deal with Michal? Why was she such a sour puss? She had made everything about herself. She was somebody. She was the daughter of the first king of Israel. She was the wife of the second king of Israel. That was her identity. What were people going to think of her when they saw her idiot husband dancing around like a fool before the entire nation? Surely even the servant girls that she regarded as nothing would be laughing at her husband, and in turn laughing at her because she was married to Ronald McDonald.

There are a couple of things we can do that are certain to turn us into a Michal, things that sap every ounce of joy and life out of us and consequently out of any room we enter. The first is insist that we must have particular happy circumstances in order for us to be at peace and have joy. When we do not have what we demand we will feel sorry for ourselves and likely grow resentful toward God, and probably toward other people. We try to grab control of life and force it to serve our desires, and when it doesn't we get frustration, discouragement, disappointment, bitterness and cynicism. There is no joy in that.

The second thing we can do is root our identity in some position, talent, ability or achievement. By doing this we are making the opinions of other people the thing that is the basis of our identity. We must do something that will cause them to admire us and approve of us. This was Michal's problem. Her identity was rooted in being Israel's First Lady. What would people think when her husband was running around doing a great imitation of Clarabelle the clown from the Howdy Doody Show? She couldn't stand it.

In his book, *Searching For God Knows What*, Donald Miller wrote, "we all have these little acts, these stupid things we do that we all hang our hats on...Some of us are athletes and others of us are physicists, and some of us are good looking and



some of us are rich, and we are all running around...trying to get a bunch of people to clap for us.”

What if our “little act” as Donald Miller called it, doesn’t impress anyone? Michal demonstrates for us that when we root our identity in any of the things that human nature tells us to, a whole series of bad things happen. We become sensitive, easily threatened, annoyed when others don’t recognize our identity and our importance, we grow desperate for their approval, we get bitter because life has handed us nothing but lemons. You can’t live on lemonade. We become like Michal.

What will they think? That one question haunts every single one of us every day of our lives. Years ago Laurie and I went to the airport to pick up a family member who was flying in to San Diego. When we got to the airport we learned that the flight was a little delayed so we had to wait for a bit. We found a some seats in a good location and settled in to wait. I went to the restroom and on the way back was surprised to see a pair of women’s underwear lying on the floor not far from where we were seated. When I got back I pointed it out to Laurie and said, “Look at that. Some woman dropped a pair of underwear on the floor over there. Do you think it must have fallen out of a suitcase or something?” She got a funny look on her face then started laughing. I was about to say that it was kind of funny but that it wasn’t so funny that it would cause me to laugh as hard as she was. Then she really surprised me. Before I could say anything she said, “That’s my underwear.” I had no idea how to respond to that. Finally I said, “How is that possible?” She explained that she had wondered where that pair had gone. She figured somehow it had gotten caught in her pant leg the day before when she was taking her pants off. She had wondered where they were. So they were in her pant leg and while she was walking in the airport they had finally fallen out. Then she said, “Go pick them up.” Gallantly I said, “I’m not going to walk out there and pick up a pair of women’s underwear. You go get them.” She wasn’t anxious to do it either. Why did neither of us want to pick up the item in question? Because of what people might think. Oh look at that man, he’s got a problem, he’s carrying around women’s underwear. Oh, look at that woman. She doesn’t have any pride at all, she’s scavenging underwear she picked up off the floor in the airport. Who cares what random people I don’t know at the airport will think? Um, sadly, I do.

We have new neighbors that moved in a few weeks ago. We are just getting to know them. Last weekend the wife in the family had a birthday party and they invited us to come. They had a taco bar at the party. Somehow, as is my habit, I managed to spill on my shirt. So here I was at a party where we knew no one, meeting all new people, and I’ve got a stain on my shirt. I felt self-conscious.

Everyone is going to look at me and think, “What a slob.” Self-conscious is the problem. Conscious of self. What do they think of me? That absolutely destroys joy and freedom. No one who is self-conscious is ever going to dance before the Lord in their linen ephod. They will never whirl to the max.

Here is the thing that is at the core of our identity. God is with us. It is his love, his choosing of us, that makes us valuable. It is his presence with us that makes us secure and at peace. It is his presence with us that makes us able to dance regardless of what other people think.

## APPLICATION

### REMINDE YOURSELF THAT WHAT PEOPLE THINK DOES NOT MATTER

I think back to the underwear adventure at the airport now and realize that what anybody at the airport that day thought did not matter at all. I have no idea who they were and who cares if they thought I was some sort of weirdo. I realize now I missed an opportunity to add even more laughter to our lives. What I wish I would have done was boldly march out, pick up that pair of underwear and say to Laurie, “Hey, Laurie, aren’t these yours? Don’t you need them?”

Being self-conscious is a prison, and it is one we put ourselves in. Most of the time people don’t think anything about us. And at the end of the day what they think is totally irrelevant. I have told before many times the day this truth became crystal clear to me. I was trying to play baseball in college with little success. I was spending a lot of time sitting in the dugout because I wasn’t very good. Then one day in a game I made a great play and later overheard teammates saying I ought to be playing instead of the guy who was playing my position. The next game I was back on the bench. I may have impressed a couple of teammates, but I didn’t impress the coach, and his opinion was the only one that mattered. What other people think doesn’t matter even a little. All it does is turn us into gray people like Michal. Only God’s opinion matters.

### REVEL IN GOD’S PRESENCE WITH YOU MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE

Eugene Peterson wrote, “Dancing as a metaphor for worship gives the sense that our response to God takes us out of ourselves and sets us free from the plod of merely getting across the street.”

When God’s love for us and his presence with us becomes real to us, like David we will want to dance. We will celebrate him and his love. That joy will eclipse the things that imprison us.

## REMEMBER GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE

What kills our dance is thinking that somehow we have to make God love us and want to be with us. We think we have to perform to get him to accept us.

When I was a kid in elementary school my favorite parts of the school day, by far, were recess and P.E. I can think of few worse ways to educate boys than making them sit at a desk in a room all day long. I loved going out at recess or during PE and playing kickball, football, softball, basketball, volleyball, anything with a ball. But every year they would pull a foul trick on me. Time would come for PE and it would be...square dancing! It was awful. You had to dance with girls. And you had to follow particular steps. What is an allemande left, and as a boy I had an inherent objection to anything called a dosie-do. There was no joy in it because it was something we were forced to do and you had to do it in a particular way. I know there are people who love square dancing, but few if any of them are 10 year old boys. For me it was cruel and unusual punishment. God doesn't give us a set of steps to follow and tell us to do it right or you'll get a bad grade and maybe even flunk. He invites us to dance like David, to whirl and leap for joy because nothing will ever separate us from his love. He is with us and will never leave us, so start dancing with all your might because we have much to celebrate.